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ALL-STORY LOVE

APR.

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by DIANE AUSTIN

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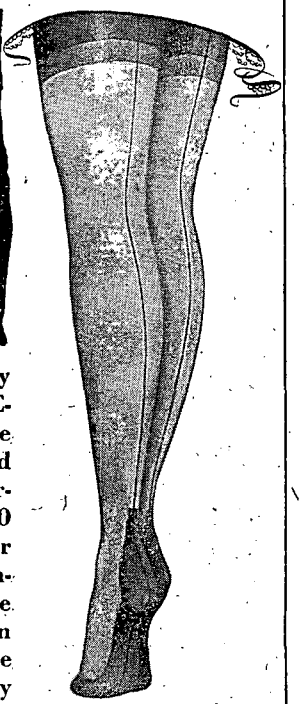

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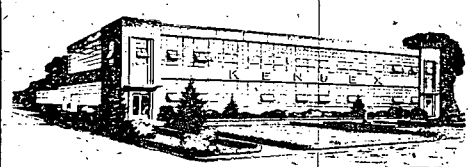

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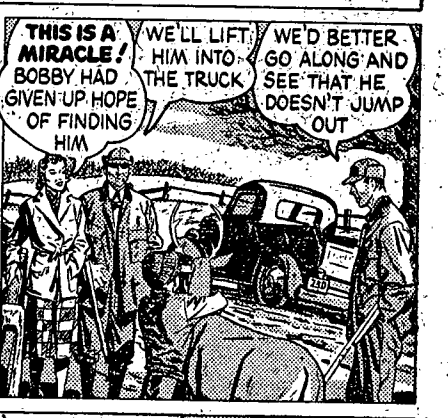
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WE'D BETTER GO ALONG AND SEE THAT HE DOESN'T JUMP OUT

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ALL-STORY LOVE

Volume 121, No. 3 April, 1951

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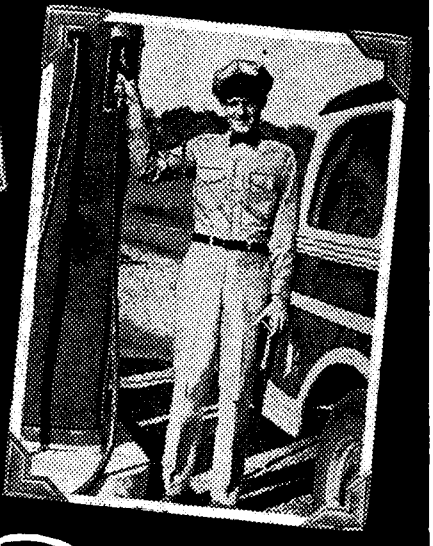

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LIKE THE magician's assistant sawed in half at every performance, Diane Austin is—not one person but two—Irma and Rocky Kalish, who do their writing in sunny Los Angeles, California to the accompaniment of a baby daughter's chatter.

To begin with the petticoat partner of the combination, Irma was born in New York in 1924 and grew up in the big city. She remembers that she wrote her first story way back in the eighth grade of elementary school, for an English assignment. And although she can't or won't recall the plot, it couldn't have been too awful because it pointed her determination toward a writing career.

In high school and at Syracuse University she did the usual stints on school magazines and yearbooks and kept right on aiming for that career. It was at college, too, that romance entered the picture. One of the girls there had a boy friend stationed at an air base in Maine who had a buddy . . . And that's how Irma and Rocky met. That's a pretty good start for a love story, they both think, and maybe they'll even use it some day.

Well, after leaving school, Irma got a job with a publishing firm as assistant to one of the love book editors. The valentine atmosphere must have agreed with her, because she began turning out a steady stream of love tales, including a "passel of western romance yarns," and became the editor of a western love magazine.

(Please turn to page 8)

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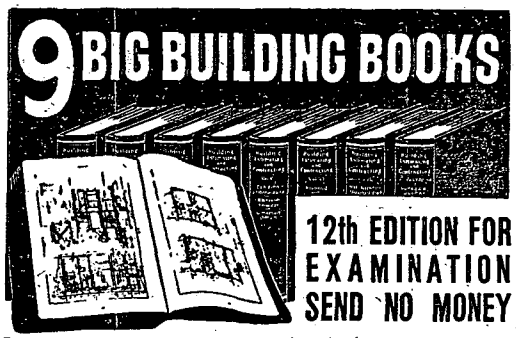

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ALL-STORY LOVE

(Continued from page 6)

Rocky, meanwhile, was still one of the millions of men in uniform. He, too, was born and bred in New York and attended New York University until just before the war broke out. He was pecking away at a typewriter in those days also, and even while in the Army was working on short stories and song lyrics.

After V-J Day, Rocky settled in Los Angeles. There he turned his hand to writing for radio and polishing up those song lyrics. In March of 1948 he returned to New York for his sister's wedding, and at the wedding ran into Irma again. They became engaged right then and there. (Plot Number Two for a future love story, say the Kalishes.)

Rocky went right back to California, and Irma joined him in June, bag, baggage and still editor of the magazine—which the boss gave to them for a wedding present. They were married, and honeymooned on Catalina Island. Rocky likes to tell the aggrieved story of how they had to cut their honeymoon short and rush back to the mainland because of having to meet a deadline on a novelette they were working on. They evened the score later by using a romantic Catalina background in several stories.

And so Rocky and Irma set up housekeeping, magazine-keeping and a writing menage. Together they've written a book, a musical comedy and dozens and dozens of love yarns, Western and dude alike. There've been no takers on the book or musical yet, but Irma and Rocky are still optimistic. Meanwhile, they say, "it was nice to have written them."

Rocky's still plugging away on those songs, too, and lately there've been a coupla nibbles from publishers. Irma wishes she had the voice to help him out on his record making. But she can only sing one

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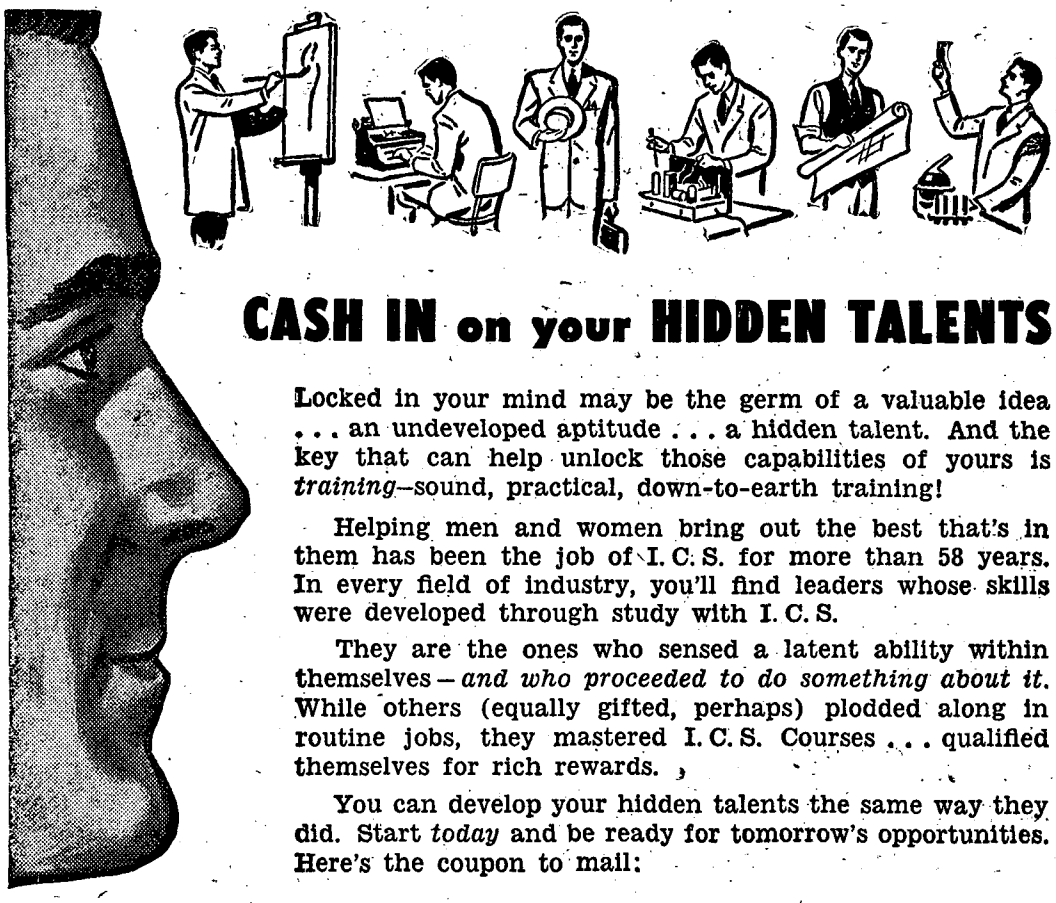

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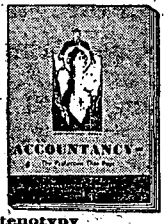

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(Continued from page 8)

note, she laments, and "he never writes them in that note!"

Baby Nancy came along a year ago, and is now quite a grown-up little girl, who walks and feeds herself and can do more damage with her mommy and daddy's writing materials than a bull in a glassware shop. "But she checks the baby talk in our love stories for anthenticity," Irma and Rolky say with perfectly straight faces.

And pity the poor California writers! Irma and Rocky do some of their writing on the Santa Monica and Malibu beaches, their two typewriters on the sand, Nancy running around in a sunsuit, and a coupla fishing poles propped up nearby just in case the fish are biting.

Irma and Rocky really enjoy writing together. They feel that having both the woman's and man's angle on every story makes the characters more convincing and the dialogue more true-to-life. And they have every intention of keeping on with their work for many, many long and happy years to come.

Two-Faced Moon, incidentally, which appears in this issue, is one of their favorite stories; because of the California background and the heavy accent on the love angle.

And when Irma and Rocky think it over, maybe they'll come up with a future plot Number Three. That of husband and wife writing together . . .

Next Month's All-Story Feature:

HONEYMOON FOR SALE

By

Francis Flick

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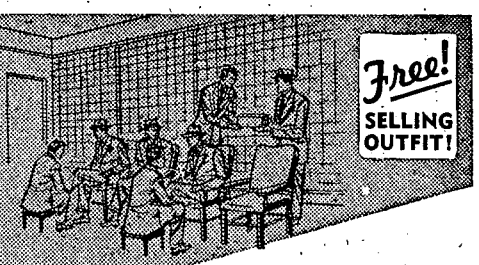

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You Don't Invest a Cent! . . . Everything Furnished *FREE!*

I'll put a profitable "shoe store business" right in your pocket! Make quick cash—earn liberal advance commissions from the first hour you work! You have none of the usual store expenses of rent, light, heat, etc.—no investment in costly stock. WE FURNISH EVERYTHING YOU NEED—SHOW YOU HOW TO MAKE BIG MONEY FROM THE VERY START!

Get into this business of never-ending demand, because EVERYONE WEARS SHOES! You'll get quick orders from comfort-hungry folks, and plenty of repeat business right along, following our TESTED SELLING METHODS proved by over 5,000 successful salesmen!

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PUT A "SHOE STORE BUSINESS" RIGHT IN YOUR POCKET . . . YOU DON'T INVEST A CENT . . . MAKE BIGGER PROFITS . . . NO STORE OVERHEAD . . . EXCLUSIVE SALES FEATURES BUILD YOUR REPEAT BUSINESS!

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Popular, air-cooled styles lead a wonderful line of foot-wear in the finest leathers, latest styles, and the EXCLUSIVE comfort-features that cannot be found in retail stores! You can satisfy the needs and taste of almost everyone in your territory—SELL COMFORT, STYLE, QUALITY and CASH IN! Sport, dress, work shoes for men and women—EXTRA profits with Leather Jackets, Raincoats, Wool Shirts, etc.!!

EXTRA PROFITS SELLING CLOTHING

In addition to the generous profit you make on every pair of shoes, you have an opportunity to ADD TO YOUR INCOME by selling top quality Leather Jackets, Wool Shirts, Raincoats for men and women.

Guaranteed by Good Housekeeping

GOOD HOUSEKEEPING SEAL OPENS DOORS

Recognized by women all over the world as the symbol of quality merchandise, the Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval on Velvet-eez shoes opens doors for you and clinches sales

A PENNY POSTCARD CAN PUT YOU IN BUSINESS!

Sell them all! When you send your name and address on this coupon—even on a penny postcard—you are launching yourself in an entirely new world of profit! Sell them all! Complete line! 160 fine shoe styles of finest quality, plus other fast-selling numbers, all included in FREE SELLING OUTFIT! Rush that coupon today for your BIG CHANCE in '51!

BILL EVANS, TELLS HOW HE HAS A PAY-DAY EVERYDAY!

"I have been a salesman for thirty years, but I never thought selling could be so easy and pleasant. I HAVE A PAYDAY EVERY DAY I WORK! All I do is hand a new customer a sample and ask if he ever wore Velvet-eez Air Cushion shoes. I never forget to mention the way we give correct fit."

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Velvet-eez **AIR CUSHION** CLINCHES SALES FOR YOU!

When you sell this line, you sell FEATURES—features that no other shoe man can offer the folks in your territory—like this wonderful EXCLUSIVE Velvet-Eez AIR CUSHION that brings day-long comfort to men and women who are on their feet on hard floors and pavements from early morning to late night. The 5-second Velvet-Eez Demonstrator you'll get free in your Sales Outfit will clinch sales for you as it has for hundreds of other Consolidated Shoe Men all over the country!

DON'T DELAY

RUSH THE COUPON NOW!

Consolidated Shoe System
Dept. S-116, Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin

Set me up for BIG PROFITS! Rush me FREE Selling Outfit featuring AIR CUSHION shoes, Jackets, Coats, Shirts, etc. Include amazing 5-second Velvet-eez Demonstrator, send it all FREE and PREPAID.

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Dept. S-116 Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin

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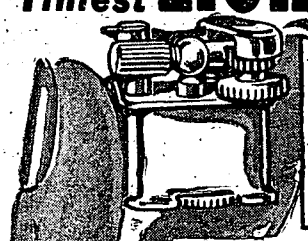

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Only ¾" Tall, ¾" Wide, ¼" Thick!
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You'll be thrilled... your friends will be amazed when you use the WORLD'S SMALLEST LIGHTER! Never before a lighter so small... yet so mechanically perfect. Gives a sure light every time you use it. Perfect for women because it has a built-in eyelet for use on charm bracelet or as a brooch. Wear it as a novel scatter pin. Men go for this tiny lighter because it takes a minimum of pocket room. Hides away in vest pocket. Creates a sensation wherever it's used. NOT A TOY! A sturdy, PRECISION-BUILT LIGHTER that will give years of service. Designed and built like a fine watch, handsomely plated in fine chrome. Uses regular fuel and flints.

Unconditionally Guaranteed!

SEND NO MONEY! Pay postman only $1.00 each plus 35c postage on delivery. Or send cash with order and save 35c postage charges. Order 6 right now for only $5.00... a 20% savings for you! Use lighter 10 days. If not delighted, return for immediate refund.

MODERN MERCHANDISE, Dept. 350
169 W. Madison Street, Chicago 2, Illinois

TO JOIN—Write a letter to Mrs. Dale telling about yourself, your school or work, and your hobbies and pastimes, the sort of letter which will make readers want to write to you. Sign a nickname, and also give your real name and address, plainly written. WHEN YOU WRITE TO A PAL—Enclose a plain stamped envelope bearing the number of the Pal for whom your letter is intended. Be sure to sign your full name and address to your letter, so the reply will come direct to you. Send your letter to Dorothea Dale at 205 East 42nd Street, New York City 17, and she will address and forward your letter to the Pen Pal you have selected. You may write several Pals if you wish, but be sure to enclose a stamped envelope for each. Notify Mrs. Dale at once of any change of address, giving your number, and your old and new address.

A-2739 YOUNGSTER

Here is a twelve year old girl, five feet three, who loves dancing and singing and all kinds of sports. I am crazy about horses. I'd like to receive letters from pen pals out west, but I will answer whoever writes; so come on, pen pals.

Blondie

A-2740 I'M FROM MISSOURI

Here is a fellow American in his middle fifties, hale and hearty, five feet eleven and still handsome. My hobby is raising broilers and it is proving quite successful. I am seeking some real friends. I'm single.

Woody

A-2741 SWEET SIXTEEN

Are there any lonely boys and girls who would like to correspond with a girl who is sixteen, five feet three, has auburn hair and hazel eyes. I like some sports, roller skating, movies, barbershop harmony. I collect odd dolls. Will answer all letters promptly.

Ginger

A-2742 ELIGIBLE MALE

A Texas bachelor, twenty-nine old, six feet tall, says he will do his best to answer all letters coming his way. I like animals, children, sports, especially swimming, and baseball. I like to do most anything and will be glad to tell you about Texas.

Jim

(Please turn to page 110)

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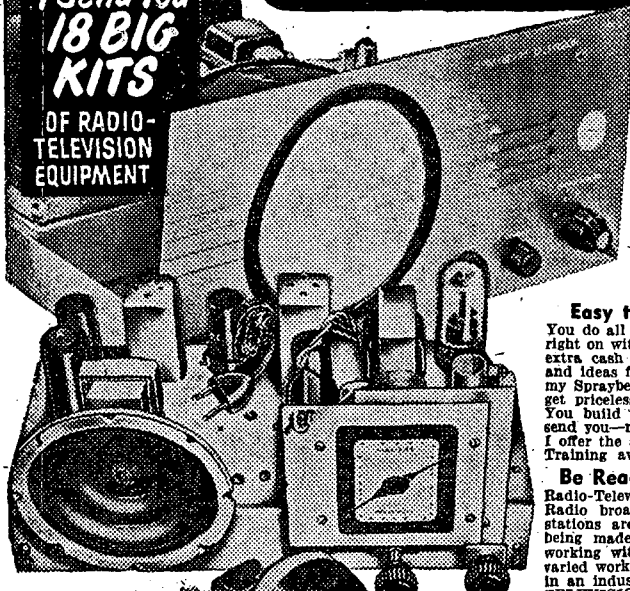
Train at Home in Spare Time for RADIO and TELEVISION

I Send You 18 BIG KITS OF RADIO-TELEVISION EQUIPMENT



My Famous Training System Prepares You Double Quick For a Good Job or Your Own Profitable Radio-Television Business

Radio-Television is now America's greatest opportunity field! Trained men are needed to fill good jobs and handle profitable Radio-Television Service work. I have trained hundreds of men for success in Radio-Television—and I stand ready to Train you too, even if you have no previous experience. My training is 100% practical—designed to give you the knowledge and experience you need to make money in Radio-Television in the shortest possible time. I Train you with up-to-the-second revised lessons—PLUS many big kits of Radio-Television equipment. You actually do over 300 demonstrations, experiments and construction projects. In addition, you build a Powerful 6-tube-2-band radio, a multi-range test meter and a complete Television receiver! All equipment is YOURS TO KEEP.

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You do all your training with me AT HOME in spare hours. Keep right on with your present job and income while learning—and earn extra cash besides! The day you enroll I begin sending you plans and ideas for doing profitable spare time Radio-TV work. Many of my Sprayberry students pay for their entire training this way! You get priceless experience and many plans for making extra money. You build all your own Radio-TV Test Equipment from parts I send you—nothing else to buy. Just one more reason why I believe I offer the ambitious man the biggest value in top notch Radio-TV Training available anywhere in America today.

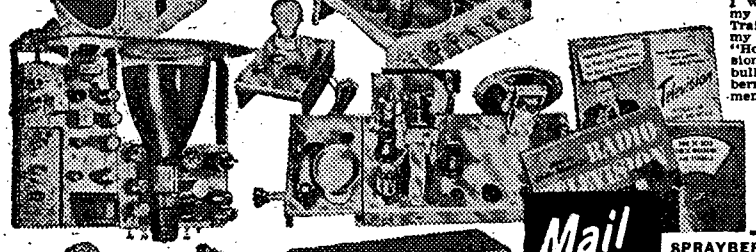
Be Ready for Top Paying Radio-Television Jobs

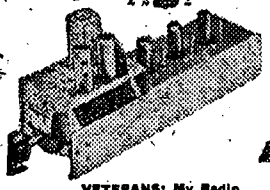
Radio-Television is growing with amazing speed. More than 2000 Radio broadcasting stations PLUS an additional 102 Television stations are now on the air. Radio sets and TV receivers are being made and sold in record breaking numbers. If you enjoy working with your hands . . . if you like to do interesting and varied work . . . if you really want to make good money and work in an industry that has a future . . . YOU BELONG IN RADIO-TELEVISION. But you MUST have good Training to "cash in" . . . the kind of training that starts you out with basic fundamentals and carries you right through every circuit and problem of Radio-Television Servicing and Repair. In a word . . . that's Sprayberry Training . . . the course backed by more than 20 years of association with the Radio-Television industry!

FREE 3 BIG RADIO AND TELEVISION BOOKS

I want you to have ALL the facts about my complete system of Radio-Television Training! Act now! Rush the coupon for my three big Radio-Television books: "How To Make Money in Radio-Television." PLUS my new illustrated Television bulletin PLUS an actual sample Sprayberry Lesson—all FREE with my compliments. No obligation and no salesman will call on you. Send the coupon in an envelope or paste on back of post card. I will rush all three books at once!

Sprayberry Academy of Radio, Dept. 53-U
111 N. Canal St., Chicago 6, Ill.





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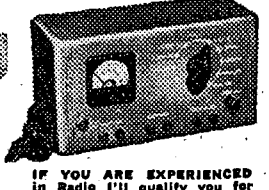

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Please Check Below About Your Experience
☐ Are You Experienced? ☐ No Experience

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Two-Faced Moon

By
DIANE
AUSTIN

Jerry took what he wanted —even if she belonged to another man.

BEYOND THE Gulf Stream's flying fish and phosphorous lies the most famous coral island in the world. Bermuda.

To some, Bermuda may mean building castles in the cleanest pink-and-white sand on earth. Or perhaps wandering over coral beaches into ocean that is now the greenest green, now the bluest blue. Or even cycling along the South Shore Road between tall hedges of oleander. Yes, Bermuda may mean many things to many people.

But to Jane Ballard, approaching its travel folder-famed shore for the first time —Bermuda meant heartbreak.

From the bow of the launch rapidly nearing Grassy Bay Anchorage, she saw through glazed eyes the bustling dockyard

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"You're the loveliest thing I've ever known," he said. "You'll marry me, won't you."

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ahead. Farther out in the harbor, was the Canadian destroyer that had brought her and the other survivers back.

When the launch had been jockeyed into position beside the dock, Jane woodenly followed the others up the steps. The reporters would be there, she knew. She could picture them checking the crash list, whispering, "Jane Ballard . . . Isn't she the girl who . . . That Hollywood producer . . ."

How was she going to stand their questions? Why didn't that cruel, unrelenting jinx of hers leave her alone?

"Oh, Miss! Hold on there a moment!"

It was too late. They had caught the scent already. She stopped, half turned, and a stout man in a loud print shirt and tan trousers came hurrying over to her. In one hand was a notebook.

Jane stiffened.

The stout man was still wheezing from his run. "How about an account of your experiences?" he asked.

Her experiences—Jane started, then came closer to laughing than she had in the last four days. Of course. It was the plane wreck he was interested in, not the—other thing.

She said slowly, as if tasting every word, "It wasn't very pleasant."

"Shouldn't think so," agreed the reporter. "One of the other passengers told me about the sharks. Now I won't keep you. Just start at the beginning and give me a brief sketch."

She smiled faintly. The beginning was a great deal farther away in time and space than the stout young man would care to know about.

She said dutifully, "Well, we had all just finished our dinners when it happened. The engines sort of coughed and then stopped, and next thing I knew we were losing altitude. The hostess was helping people fasten their safety belts, and I fixed mine, and—well, I guess I prayed.

"That night we sang a little. There was a youngster in our boat and a couple of us looked after him. I think someone told a story." She smiled faintly again. "It's a little difficult to recall, believe it or not."

The newsman chuckled. "Well, at least I didn't get the answer that most of the others gave me. You know, the one about all the events of their lives flashing before them. Guess you just live right, Miss—Miss—"

"Jane Ballard," she said in a very low voice.

When he looked up, she saw that her name meant nothing to him at all.

"Tell me, Miss Ballard," was what he said now. "How does it feel to be alive?"

"How—does—it—feel." She repeated the words in measured tones and looked away from him. Past the cluster of plane passengers and reporters. Past the growing knot of friends and relatives around them, and out toward the shore road along which a tall, dark-haired man was hurrying . . .

"No," she breathed. "Oh, no!"

Beside her, she knew, the reporter was saying something. But she had eyes only for that dark-haired figure now pushing his way through the crowds on the dock.

"Miss Ballard! How does it feel?"

How does it feel . . . How does it feel . . . How does it feel . . .

If only she knew!

THAT DAY SO long ago had been a late summer's model, sultry and warm. Jane had driven out to Paradise Cove with her roommate, Marcia Moore. Going home again, they took the picturesquely winding strip of Sunset Boulevard, and it was right at the corner of Beverly Glen that the accident happened.

Marcia had been driving, and at the intersection she was just coasting along, waiting for the light to turn green. It did and she hit the accelerator, scooting past the cars on the left of her. Too late she saw the sedan that was making a last-minute dash across Sunset. She ploughed headlong into its side.

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"You and your hard luck!" was the first thing Jane remembered Marcia saying after the stunning impact of the collision.

Both girls were unhurt. The driver of the sedan was cut slightly. Someone in the crowd said, "Better send for an ambulance."

The motorcycle patrolmen came first. Jane was watching Marcia being given a restrained, outdoors version of the third-degree, when she felt a light tap on her shoulder.

"Supposing we have a look at you," a pleasant voice said.

She turned. "I beg your . . ."

But she never finished. The pleasant voice belonged to an equally pleasant looking young interne. He was tall and thin, almost too thin, with dark, crisply waving hair, nice eyes—she couldn't make out their color for sure—and the hand he laid on her wrist was tanned and capable looking.

"Pulse normal," he grinned.

She summoned up a sniff of indignation. "I'm not hurt." She relented a little. "At least I don't think I am."

"You never know," returned the young doctor. "Sometimes there are liable to be after-effects."

"I'll watch out for them," she assured him, but somehow the words didn't sound as bantering as she had meant them to.

He gestured over to the accident. "You sure messed up that other car," he said.

Jane shook her head, and smiled a sad little smile. "I wasn't driving," she murmured. "I was jinxing."

"You were what?"

Marcia came over to them just then. "It's okay, kid. The tow car'll be along any minute. We'll take the bus and . . . Oh, Hello."

The interne nodded. "Pulse," he asked, reaching out a hand.

Marcia simpered and glanced slyly at Jane. Jane looked quickly away.

When he had finished with the other girl, he said gravely, "Don't forget now. Watch out for any of those after-effects."

Why, they're gray, Jane thought absurdly. His eyes are gray.

He nodded again, at both of them, then went back to join the other interne who was taking care of the injured driver.

WHAT DID he mean—after-effects?" Marcia demanded instantly.

Jane said, rattled, "Nothing probably. Medical talk."

Marcia rolled her eyes and gave an exaggerated sigh. "Why in the world have I been eating an apple a day—when it keeps guys like him away?"

Her roommate had light brown hair and a touch of plumpness to her curves. She never lacked for dates; yet she was always ready to lead her fancy to a new channel.

"Come on," Jane shot back. "Let's get to the bus stop." And as they started across the street, she added, as an apparent afterthought, "What's all the fuss about? He's only a man."

"Famous last words," said Marcia sagely.

Jane stored the incident away in the farthest cupboard of her mind. After all, having been endowed somewhere along the line with softly burnished red-gold hair and eyes that were like chippings of jade in the pale oval of her face—not to mention a figure that could eat its cake and have "it" too—she had grown accustomed to experimental flirtations.

Besides, in the course of her secretarial duties at the motion picture studio where she worked, she met men in all sizes and shapes. She could take them or leave them, and so far, except for casual dating and one or two almost-romances, Jane had left them.

But she had reckoned without those after-effects. Two evenings later the phone rang.

Jane answered and heard a distinctly pleasant voice that might or might not belong to a tall, almost too thin young interne say:

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"Hi, Jane. This is Dell Stevens. Remember me?"

"I don't think . . ."

"Sure you do. I'm the guy from the ambulance who saved your life the other day. Got to talkin' to the cop on the scene after you left, and just by chance he happened to give me your name and address. So here I am."

"But . . ."

"I've got four more months as an interne before I set up my own practice. Then I've got plans. Not big plans, just medium-sized. I'll tell you all about them."

Jane said, "Really, Doctor . . ."

"Call me Dell. All my patients do. As I was saying, I haven't got much at present except those middle-sized plans, but wait till you hear about my future. So how about it?"

"How about what?"

Dell Stevens demanded, "What do you think I've been shooting off my mouth for? I just got the evening off, so how about going out with me?"

She looked helplessly over at Marcia, who was standing by, smiling all too knowingly. Jane said, "I'd love to. How soon'll you be over?"

"Soon as I catch my breath," Dell returned, and hung up. "Fast work," Marcia commented. "Are you and the Doc planning on filling prescriptions tonight?"

"Who me?" Jane asked in bland innocence, already climbing out of her skirt. "I don't even know the first thing about first aid."

The evening was cool, and she wore a two-part wool jersey suit in a glowing hunter's green. But when Dell arrived and his gray eyes laughed down into hers, she had the decided feeling that the evening had become several degrees warmer.

HE LED HER outside and pointed with pride to the blue coupe of ancient vintage that was parked in front of the apartment house.

"How about a drive-in movie?" he asked. "I know where we can catch two good comedies."

"Swell!" Jane exclaimed. "But how's the popcorn?"

The popcorn proved to be exactly salty enough, and buttered just right. And the comedies, too, even turned out to be funny.

Afterward, Dell said, "Let's go someplace where we can talk and eat. I don't suppose you'd . . ." He shook his head. "Nope. I guess not."

"You don't suppose I'd what?" she prompted.

"Well, it just so happens that I know of a drive-in restaurant where they serve the best jumbo hamburgers on the coast. They put practically everything on the menu between two slices of bun."

Jane had to laugh. Dell was so like a little boy. She wrinkled up her nose. "That's for me!"

And that was when she heard the voice for the first time. The taunting, tinkling little voice from deep down inside her that warned, Careful, Jane. When you get to thinking they're like little boys—that's when to watch out!

But Dell pointed out a spot of scenery to her just then, and the little voice was lost among the quickened tattoo of her heartbeats.

They kept on up Fairfax, then turned off to the steeply snaking road of Laurel Canyon. Jane held her breath on the curves. She never had gotten used to the roller-coaster thrills of some of the canyon roads.

Dell must have noticed her tenseness. "Relax," he drawled. "You're in capable hands."

Her lips twisted. "You don't know me. Marcia thinks I own a jinx."

"Marcia? Oh, your roommate. You mean one little auto accident and she credits you with the evil-eye?"

Jane shook her head. "If it were only that one accident. But we had a fire in the apartment the first day I moved in. And,

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well, there've been one or two other things."

They were out in the Valley now, on Ventura Boulevard, and Dell skillfully swung the car into a neon-lighted drive-in. He braked to a stop.

"My advice to you, Jane," he said tersely, patting her shoulder, "is to forget it."

They had a hamburger and coffee apiece, and before the last filling bite was washed down by the last sip, Jane knew as much about Dell as his eager voice could confide to her between munches.

He had gone to Medical School at the University of Southern California, and when he was through with his internship he was heading home to tack up his M. D. shingle above the door of a certain Cape Cod cottage he had in mind. It was set right on the crest of a hill.

"Where's home?" Jane asked idly.

"In a place called Castroville," he told her.

"That's up north," he went on. "It's not exactly the garden spot of California, and it's kind of a pint-sized town where nothing much ever happens. But it's plenty good enough for me. My Aunt Lou and Uncle Abner live there. Raised me from a pup."

JANE KNEW what small towns were like. She had come from one herself, deep in the corn belt of Iowa.

"I guess it must make you feel good," she said slowly. "Going back home to be the doctor for the folks you've grown up with and known all your life. Instead of, well, maybe remaining here and building up a more . . . a more lucrative practice."

"Going back home," he repeated. "Jane, it's what I've wanted all my life. Maybe it sounds corny, but it's what I've been working for and wishing for."

"It doesn't sound corny at all," she murmured, and there was a funny little catch in her voice.

She had never heard any other man talk this way before. It was a new line for which she didn't have any stock answers, any gay, meaningless repartee to toss back. And so she remained helplessly silent.

"Come on," he said. "We're getting out of here."

That was better. Those were familiar words, a line she had often heard.

"Where to, Doc?" she asked, brightening.

"Hold tight and you'll see," he muttered, zooming the car back onto the boulevard.

She couldn't tell where they were headed then. They came in from the Valley, and finally slowed down across from a large, drab building. Dell parked.

"Why, this looks like a hospital." She was genuinely surprised.

"And the lady wins a big fat cigar," Dell said. Only he said it without mirth.

"This is where you work, isn't it?"

"Yup. I wanted you to see it, Jane. Can you guess why?"

For a split second she hesitated, then shook her head. With the others she had always been able to tell beforehand. With Dell, she couldn't even guess.

He said, "I wanted you to see what you were up against. Oh, not just that hospital there, but everything that goes with it. The sick and injured, the calls for help at all hours of the day and night, the futile, weary fumbling around when we don't know."

Dell paused to light a cigarette, flipped the match through the window.

"Think you can take it, Jane?" he asked.

Uncertainly she began, "I . . ."

"Think you want to?"

He didn't give her time to answer at all. His arms were suddenly around her, scooping her to him, and then his head was bending closer, and his lips met hers with a rush of longing.

She felt a stirring within her. Could this be the sleeping desire none of the other men had ever awakened? Could this be the love she had so yearned for and had so despaired of ever realizing? She didn't

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know, she didn't care! Her hands clasped around his neck, tightly. On her soft, young mouth pulsed all the vibrant warmth she could give him.

His lips moved to the fluttering hollow of her temple and brushed it lightly.

"Time I was getting you home," Dell murmured.

In front of the apartment house, Dell helped her out of the car. She turned to him a little breathlessly.

"Back at the hospital, Dell," she faltered. "I, I never did answer your question."

Gently, he cuffed her chin with the back of his hand. "That's what you think, baby," he murmured. "'Night. Don't go away from the phone."

ONE EVENING, after weeks of evenings spent together, Jane and Dell buttoned up their raincoats and went for a walk in the rain.

It had started out as a lazy drizzle, but it was coming down in sheets before too long.

"Shall we run for it?" Dell asked.

She shook her head and sent the spray flying from damp, coppery tendrils of hair. "Uh-uh. I love it!"

"Jane."

She stopped, looked up at him. "Yes?"

"You're the loveliest thing I've ever known," he said. "You're going to marry me, aren't you?"

Raindrops have a suspicious habit of looking like tears when a girl's eyelashes are beaded with them. And Jane, blinking up at Dell in the gray half-light of the early evening, couldn't even be sure herself. She only knew that all the happiness there was in the world had just been handed to her.

She murmured, with a funny sort of huskiness in her voice, "You're the doctor, Dell."

And when he kissed her at that moment, it was the kiss a man bestows on the woman who now belongs to him. It was a kiss of infinite sweetness and tenderness, and yet of hunger and longing, too. Jane kissed him back with her heart on her mouth, with all her love showing, shining and unafraid.

The next evening, a small diamond sparkled on her third finger, left hand.

"You shouldn't have done it," Jane whispered in awed tones, turning her finger every which way to catch the myriad reflections of light from the stone.

Dell shrugged casually, at the same time looking very smug and pleased with himself.

"Nothing's too good for my girl," he said pompously. "Besides, it's been kind of monotonous not having any payments to meet every month. And furthermore, just wait till the folks back up in Castroville get a gawk at that."

The folks back up in Castroville. Of course. She had almost forgotten.

"I'm looking forward to meeting your home town, Dell," she said in an overstarched voice.

"Baby!" exclaimed Dell, grabbing her around the waist. "Do you know how much I love you?"

As usual, he didn't wait for an answer. He took it with his lips and once again Jane marveled that so much happiness could be all hers. She'd see if she couldn't talk to Dell again about that hometown fixation of his. Perhaps mention it rather casually some time.

But not now . . .

AT THE STUDIO the next morning, the girls in the secretarial pool office "oohed" and "ahed" about her ring and demanded to know everything there was to know about Jane's doctor-to-be, and how did it feel to be lovely, engaged and using carbon paper.

After the flurry of giggles which this last remark called for, the plump redhead at the corner desk wanted to know, "When you getting married, sugar?"

"Why . . ." Jane stopped. Then smiled a little abashedly and confessed "You'll never

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believe it, but I really did forget to ask."

There was another round of laughter at that, and in the midst of the merriment a man walked in the door. He was a well-built, polished looking man, with light hair and deepset eyes that seemed to X-ray the room at a glance. At sight of him the girls scurried back to their typewriters.

Jane recognized him although she hadn't actually met him before. He was Jerry Paxton, the latest sensation in the producing end of motion pictures.

He cleared his throat and one eyebrow shot up quizzically. "Hope I'm not interrupting anything," he remarked agreeably. "My secretary won't be in today—her father passed away—and I was hoping one of you girls would be able to pitch in."

Marge, the redhead, tittered. "We were just having a little celebration, Mr. Paxton," she spoke up. "Jane just got herself engaged."

"I see," he said, just as agreeably as before. "And who, may I ask, is Jane?"

A dozen fingers pinpointed her as their target. Jane felt the hot color stain her cheeks, and a little half-smile almost of guilt flitted across her lips.

The deepset eyes now concentrated on her. They were taking her in, leisurely, from trim pumps and slender, shapely, nylon-clad legs to the soft, red-gold sheen of her hair, lingering most of all over the lime wool sweater that clung in all the right places. The eyes liked what they saw, and they didn't bother to keep it a secret.

She felt like quivering under his gaze. This man had a queer pull of attraction.

He said, "Got a notebook, Jane?"

"Why, yes."

"You'll do then. Be in my office in ten minutes."

Then he strode out of the room.

"Well, how do you like that," Jane breathed shakily. "This must be my lucky week."

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Marge hooted raucously. "Got a notebook?" she asked in mocking tones. "Oh brother!"

Jane stood up and collected her pencils, insisting. "Just the same, it is a break."

"I'll say it is," retorted the redhead. "From what I hear, when Wonder-man Paxton asks a girl to pitch in, she has to do a heck of a lot more catching than pitching —if you get what I mean."

Jane got what she meant. That kind of remark ran a dime a dozen around the studio, about everyone from the president on down. She held her ring up and lightly blew on it.

"I've got my love to keep me warned," she said, grinning, and went on out.

JERRY PAXTON'S office overlooked the flagstone-paved patio of the inner studio courtyard. Jane sat in an extremely modern chair done in ash wood and black leather and held her pencil poised over the lined paper. The producer hadn't even gotten up when she came in and he didn't appear to be taking notice of her now.

"Ready?" he asked.

She nodded.

"Letter to Mr. Paul Cashmere of Allied Theaters, Inc. You'll find the address in the files. Dear Mr. Cashmere . . ."

The dictation went on, steadily, for two and a half hours. Jane wore down the points of three pencils, and had to make her scrawled notations fairly fly in order to keep up with his machine-gun pace. And then, abruptly, he looked up at her.

"That's it," he said.

She closed her book, got up. "I'll have those letters typed for you this afternoon," she began mechanically.

He leaned way back and his eyes narrowed to probing slits. "No hurry," he murmured. "Jane . . ."

When he spoke like that, his tone was so intimate, so very specially meant for her.

She stepped hard on that crazy notion. Her hand reached for the doorknob.

Jerry Paxton said, "Where you going?"

"Why, I . . ." she glanced swiftly at her watch. "It's almost lunchtime, and . . ."

"Fine. How about having it with me?"

Her hand still on the knob, wavered.

"Oh come now," he jeered. "Surely there's nothing so improper about a pretty young engaged girl like you having lunch with her employer." He added, "In the studio commissary, in front of everybody?"

Jane relaxed. What was the matter with her, anyway? She must have been seeing too many of the grade B movies that the studio released.

"Sounds like the 'properest' thing in the world," she told him gaily.

It was an enjoyable meal, and Jane grew less and less wary. They were among the last to remain in the huge dining place.

"Jane," Jerry Paxton said, exhaling a cloud of smoke. "I like you. I like the way you take dictation. I think I've got plans for you."

She murmured, softly, "Middle-sized plans?"

"What's that?"

"Nothing."

He reached across to pat her hand, and at his touch flame seemed to lick at her skin. She jumped up from the table.

Again that eyebrow of his quirked upward. But he put down his napkin and arose, too.

"Thanks, Jane," he said. "I won't need you this afternoon. Tomorrow then?"

She nodded, and watched him stride swiftly off. I must have acted the perfect little fool, she thought savagely. He only meant to be nice.

When she returned to the secretarial pool, she was glad that the other girls were either out or too busy with their typing to ask any questions.

DELL HAD a few hours off duty that evening, and they drove to a favorite parking spot, high up on Mulholland Drive, overlooking the lights of the city.

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"Wait till you hear, Dell . . ." she began excitedly, as soon as he had put on the hand brake.

"Good news, baby?" he asked, his arm drawing her close to him. "I've got some, too."

"Oh, but listen to this. I took dictation from Jerry Paxton today!"

Dell looked at her blankly. "Okay," he said. "I'll bite. Who's Jerry Paxton?"

Disappointed, she answered, "He's a producer."

"Good for you, baby." He stroked her shoulder. "Now you just listen to this."

She glanced up at him expectantly.

"You and I are taking ourselves up to Castroville this week end!"

The words sank in. She repeated slowly, "We are. But how?"

"I pulled a coupla of strings and arranged for the few days off. We'll drive up tomorrow afternoon and stay with my aunt and uncle, and we'll go have a look at that Cape Cod cottage. How does it sound to you?"

"It sounds wonderful," she said. And she tried to mean it, too. She tried to mean it with all her heart.

But still, she was rather annoyed that Dell hadn't been more impressed with her bit of news. The thought pricked at her consciousness until, finally, she blurted, "By the way, all the girls are warning me about Jerry Paxton."

"Warning you about what?"

She shrugged. "The usual thing."

"Oh yeah!" said Dell, and sat up very straight.

Then he slouched back again, with a sheepish sort of grin. "Heck. I know my baby. Just let him try anything—you'll put him in his place. Jane sweet, I trust you in anybody's arms except my own!"

Then she was in his arms, clinging fast to his lips, and she felt warm and tingling and loved and secure, and nothing in the whole wide world could ever come between them.

What makes you so sure? whispered that taunting, deep-down, inner voice of hers.

But if she heard it, she gave no sign. She only kissed Dell harder.

And, strangely, Marcia sounded worried when she told her about Jerry Paxton later that night.

"It doesn't sound on the up-and-up to me." Her roommate frowned.

"Don't be silly, Marcia! Besides, it's only temporary, anyway. His regular secretary'll soon be back."

She shook her head. "I don't know, honey. You and that hard luck of yours."

"What hard luck?" Jane pooh-poohed. "Haven't you heard? I'm in love with a wonderful guy!"

Marcia said solemnly, "Just the same. You watch your step."

Taking deliberate aim, Jane caught her roommate neatly with a flung pillow. Both girls dissolved into laughter.

JERRY PAXTON sent for her early the next morning.

"Sit down," he directed abruptly. "Take a letter."

He said, "To Miss Jane Ballard. My dear Miss Ballard . . ."

Her pencil slithered off the paper. She glanced up questioningly.

"You are cordially invited to be my permanent secretary."

And now she stood up. "I . . ." she began, then stopped.

"My former secretary, Miss Johnson, isn't coming back, Jane," he told her affably, as if unaware of her perplexity. "I'd like very much for you to take over."

Jane didn't know what was wrong with her, standing there all flustered and bothered, like an awkward schoolgirl. This was the chance any girl in the secretarial pool would jump at. But Marcia's words came back to her—I don't know, honey. You and that hard luck of yours. Her head swam.

"That's very kind of you," she heard herself saying stiffly and formally. "I appreciate the opportunity."

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Jerry Paxton threw his head back and laughed heartily. "Come off it, Jane. Appreciate the opportunity nothing. The hours are irregular, the work is demanding and I'm a tough and exacting boss who'll crack the whip and expect you to jump through hoops. Is it a deal?"

She smiled. "Do I furnish my own hoops?"

"Good girl!" he said, and lightly put his arm around her shoulders.

She flinched. Why should even that friendly gesture be like a caress.

"How'd you like that take-a-letter business?" he asked. "I lifted the routine from some lousy picture or other we made."

Her smile came more full then, grew up and bubbled into a laugh. "I know," she murmured. "I saw it."

"Okay. Now we get down to work."

Jane remembered something. "What are the chances of getting some of those irregular hours this afternoon? Letting me off—say at three?"

His face was expressionless. "The boy friend?" he asked.

She nodded. "We're planning on driving up to Dell's home town for the entire weekend."

"Sure," he said promptly. "Have fun. Though if it's like all those other home towns I've ever seen, I don't know where you're going to find any fun."

She made a grimace. "You're so right. I come from a little town in Iowa myself." She hesitated. "I hated it!"

He glanced at her shrewdly and then appeared to be considering. "Tell you what. Take off right after lunch. We'll make up for it next week."

"You're an angel," she beamed.

The corners of his mouth twitched. For the first time she noticed that his eyes held strange flecks of gold, like glittering lights.

"I don't think you understood me," he said pleasantly. "When I said we're going to make up for it, I mean *you're* going to make up for it to me."

FOR A MOMENT she felt a suffocating panic. But again she berated herself. Jerry Paxton was an important producer. He had lots of things on his mind, piles of work that had to be done. Why did she have to imagine ominous undertones, read meanings into his words that weren't there at all.

She was glad when the phone rang just then and she could escape to the outer office to answer it.

"Mr. Paxton," a woman's imperious voice demanded.

"Who's calling, please?" Jane asked automatically.

"Never mind who's calling! Just put him on."

Jane deliberated, then put down the phone and went back into the other room.

"There's some woman on the phone. She won't give her name."

Jerry Paxton grabbed for the receiver, waving her out. "How many times have I told you not to call here . . ." Jane heard him say just before she closed the door. He sounded angry.

But she thought no more of the incident. She was anxious to get back to the phone herself to call Dell and tell him everything was all set, to hear his voice, calm and beloved, at the other end of the line.

Dell picked her up at the apartment house. During the drive he chatted breezily about the familiar places and people they would soon be seeing.

Jane wished she could have exhibited a little more enthusiasm. But somehow, after the Hollywood glamour they were leaving behind, the stars and big names she would be rubbing elbows with in her new job, she couldn't help it, could she, if it all sounded—well, sort of humdrum?

When they reached Castroville and pulled up in front of the gray frame house that belonged to Dell's aunt and uncle, she pegged a cheerful smile on her face and tried to refrain from a shudder of revulsion at sight of the ugly building.

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"It looks a little like a barn, doesn't it?" she said tepidly.

"It was a barn!" grinned Dell, taking her hand and helping her out of the car. "But wait till you see what Aunt Lou's done with it. She's real handy that way."

The front door flew open just then and a gray-haired, comfortably-upholstered woman came running out, wiping floured hands on her apron.

"It's Dell!" she cried. "Abner, come quick. Here's Dell!"

Dell sprinted for her, put his arms around her capacious waist and somehow managed to lift her off the ground. Then he kissed her soundly and settled her back on her feet. Jane watched the scene with a tinge of apprehension.

He was leading the gray-haired woman over to her now. He was saying, "Jane, this is Aunt Lou. Aunt Lou, meet the future Mrs. Doctor Stevens."

Dell's aunt smiled. "Welcome home, Jane. You've made our boy so happy."

"I'm so happy, too." Jane murmured, and leaned forward to kiss the elderly woman.

Then a tall, gaunt man was coming out of the house and slapping Dell on the back and being introduced as Uncle Abner. Finally, Dell was able to bring their bags into the house, and they all sat down to what Aunt Lou termed just a light snack.

Jane had never seen so much food on a table in all her life—unless it was the following morning, when she came downstairs to a breakfast meal which sumptuously outdid the snack of the night before.

Dell was wearing an old faded shirt and slacks. His face was wreathed by one tremendous smile. "Wait'll you see the town," he kept saying to Jane, and then, turning to his aunt and uncle, "Wait'll the town sees her."

AND SO BEGAN the day in Castroville. Dell showed her the grade school he attended, the drugstore where he worked

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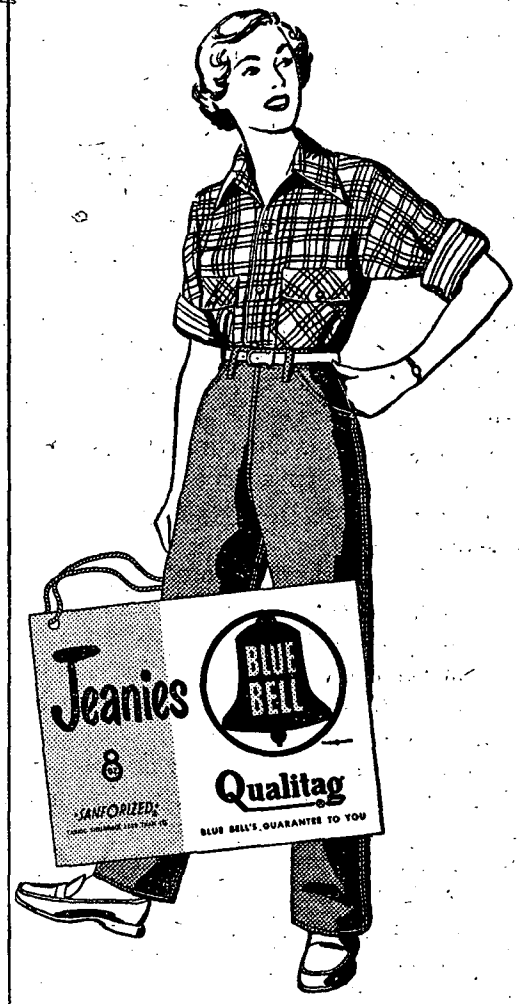

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and the football field where he had ignobly watched games from the bench. The rest of the tour also ran to that same homespun pattern.

Wherever they went, whatever they did, they kept running into the local folks who clucked and exclaimed over Dell and smiled scrutinizingly at Jane.

Jane said all the right things, all the polite things. She saw how thoroughly Dell was enjoying himself, and was determined to keep her own feelings in check. It was the least she could do for this short week end, she thought.

But Dell just couldn't throw himself away in this unimportant town of unimportant people.

In the afternoon, accompanied by Mr. Hotchkiss, the real estate agent, they went to look at the Cape Cod cottage on the hill.

"There, folks. Isn't she a beauty?" Mr. Hotchkiss crowed, throwing open the front door.

Jane walked slowly through the rooms. It was far from being a new house. A paint job would be needed, both inside and out; the kitchen and bathroom would have to be modernized; something would have to be done about heating.

Dell kept exclaiming, "Boy-oh-boy . . . Look at this, Jane . . . Can't you just picture us . . ."

Finally, this inspection was over. Dell pumped Mr. Hotchkiss' hand.

"Well, shall we take it now?" he asked Jane. He seemed so very confident that the matter was a certainty right then and there.

She spoke up quickly, softening her words with a sugar-coated smile. "Let's wait, Dell. We can always get in touch with Mr. Hotchkiss."

"Sure, honey. Anything you say." But he sounded so deflated, her heart went out to him.

And on the drive back to the gray frame house, he hardly spoke at all.

In the evening they did what everybody else in Castroville seemed to be doing. They went to a neighborhood movie. It was small and crowded and stuffy, and the single popcorn machine bore a yellowed out-of-order sign.

"Get used to this, baby," Dell whispered as he took her hand in the darkness. "It's what we'll be doing for a whole lot of Saturday nights to come. That is, if no one is having a baby or a ruptured appendix."

Silently, Jane squeezed his fingers. She had other plans for Dell's Saturday nights.

THEY SAID good-bye to Aunt Lou and Uncle Abner after an early breakfast the next morning, as Dell had to be back at the hospital for night duty. They were barely five miles along the highway, driving south, when he turned to her with an anticipatory smile.

"How'd you like the old home town?" he asked.

Jane had been bracing herself for the question ever since their departure. Now she leaned back, put an arm along the seat, and fixed her face in the conciliatory expression she had been rehearsing.

"It's very nice, Dell," she said studiedly. "Just as you described it. But don't you think . . ." and here she was picking her way with as much caution as if she were up on the narrow ledge of a precipice, "that it's a little, well, small townish for an up-and-coming doctor?"

"Hell no!" he exploded amiably. "There are people there, aren't there? They get sick, don't they? Castroville's just my dish, baby."

But it isn't mine, she thought unhappily. Dell's answer had left her stranded there on the precipice, and she wasn't sure now whether to jump off, or crawl her way back.

But it was Dell who took the next lead. "And how about the house?" he asked. "We should have taken it on the spot, honey. You could have a terrific time doing it over."

She said in a small voice, "I'm not very handy that way."

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"So what?" he beamed. "Aunt Lou'll be glad to help you."

Jane sighed. Plain enough, now was neither the time nor the place to express her true feelings. She'd have to think of something else; she'd have to do it in some other, less painful way.

As they reached familiar surroundings, approaching Los Angeles city limits, she was conscious of an enormous sense of relief, of a swelling tumult of exhilaration. She nestled closer to Dell, tucking her arm in his. She never wanted to hurt him. He was the sweetest guy in the world.

"It's been a lovely week end, Dell," she said softly. "Being with you."

He took his eyes away from the road to smile at her tenderly. "Just the beginning, honey," he told her. "Two more months and we'll have all the week ends in the world for our very own."

Jane settled back with a sigh of contentment. All was right with their world once more. But for how long . . .

WELL, HOW was the old home town?" Jerry Paxton asked her the next morning, looking up from a script he was reading.

She gave a bemused shrug. "You know. Very homespun, very quaint." She added sulkily, "Hardly the place for a rising young doctor."

"Oh, is the boy friend a pill-roller? Funny thing. I'm reading a doctor scenario now."

"He's a wonderful one!" she said fervently. And now, in one impulsive spurt of resentment, she let out all her dammed-up feelings. "He doesn't belong in a small town. I know what it's like—he'll rot there! Taking care of runny noses and ingrown toenails—and—and things like that."

"He was cut out for bigger and better things, is that it?" Jerry Paxton asked dryly.

She flushed. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to blow my top like that. It's just that—well, I got a little discouraged this week end."

"Sure," he said easily. "I know." And then he paused, his eyes narrowing thoughtfully. He began again. "This script I've got here is only the first of a cycle of doctor stories we're planning to put out. We're going to need a lot of technical advice on the stuff. You know what I mean. Guys who know their medical onions."

He stopped. She looked up at him, hope radiating in her face.

Then he smiled. "Maybe, just maybe, I can work the boy friend in as one of those advisors. It won't be much, but it'll be a start for him. He'll get to know the right people around here. Those who can do him the most good."

"Oh, that would be marvelous!" she exclaimed gratefully. "I don't know how to thank you, Mr. Paxton. I'll tell Dell tomorrow night when I see him."

"You can thank me by calling me Jerry," he said. "And I wouldn't tell him anything yet if I were you. Don't get your hopes up too high. That was an awfully big maybe, depending on a lot of things."

But Jane was still elated. Jerry Paxton, she knew, was Mr. Big around these parts. What he said went. If he wanted Dell in as a technical advisor on the pictures, he'd get him. It was the made-to-order solution for all her problems. Stepping lightly, so as not to break through the pink cloud she was on, she crossed over to the door.

"Oh, Jane . . ."

She stopped, inquiringly.

"I forgot to tell you. We're flying to New Orleans tomorrow afternoon. Special preview there on Wednesday."

"But it's . . ." She bit back the words, Dell's evening off.

After all, Jerry had warned her that her hours would be irregular. Besides, he was doing her a big favor considering Dell for the job. She couldn't protest now.

"Swell," she said. "It sounds exciting."

But when Dell called her that evening,

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he failed to share in her fine enthusiasm.

"What kind of a job is that anyway?" he demanded. "Flying to New Orleans isn't supposed to be part of your work. I don't like it."

She told him patiently, "As secretary to Mr. Paxton, I've got to go on these junkets with him. I'm sorry about tomorrow night, Dell. But you just wait and see what I've got cooking for us!"

She didn't want to tell him about his prospects of being medical advisor for the studio. At least, not right away. When the deal was all set, when Jerry Paxton gave her a definite Yes, she wanted to wrap it up with love and kisses and give it to him as a wedding present.

And she wasn't going to tell her roommate, either, even though Marcia raised skeptical eyebrows when she heard about the trip. Let her think what she wanted!

THE NEXT AFTERNOON, Jane was watching the miles scuttle away into nothingness from the window of a giant airliner en route to New Orleans. Jerry, sitting beside her, smiled cozily. "How you doing?" he asked.

"Oh, I've been up before," she told him gaily. "Once I flew all the way to San Francisco."

He laughed, and then those strange flecks of light danced again in his eyes.

"Just wait till you see New Orleans," he said. "It's Mardi Gras there all the time. I'll take you to restaurants where you'll taste food you'll swear never existed. I'll show you the street where the blues were born. Everything! I tell you, Jane, we'll do it up brown."

A frown creased her forehead. "But will we have time for all that?" she asked uncertainly. "After all, we're on business."

"Are you kidding? What business? You stick with me, baby, and you'll really live. See things and do things you've never done before. None of that small-town stagnation for us!"

It sounded thrilling and daring and frightening all at once. The fascinating images that Jerry's words conjured up stirred her expectantly, and yet—and yet, if she weren't going to work, why had he asked her to come along?

Just then the plane hit an air pocket, and her stomach did a queasy nip-up. Or had it been an air pocket . . .

Much later, ensconced in her hotel room, Jane stood by the window looking down at the unfamiliar lights of New Orleans. She felt a sudden overpowering loneliness, a longing for Dell that was almost an ache.

Jerry met her downstairs for a late bite in the hotel coffee shop, and under the spell of the tasty food and the warm laughter and conversation flowing around them, she let herself loosen up, let herself respond to his eager mood.

"How about a walk, Jane?" he suggested, when their table had been cleared. "You've never seen night-time till you've seen it in New Orleans."

She hesitated, then shook her head. "The trip's worn me out, Jerry. We'll save the sight-seeing for tomorrow."

"Sure." He got up and they strolled out of the shop.

Jerry pushed the button for the elevator. Then he turned to her.

"Did I ever tell you you're beautiful, baby," he said softly. "Let me see you upstairs."

"Please . . . I mean . . ." Oh why did she have to act like such a ninny. What was there to be afraid of? What *did* she mean, anyway?

But she should have known the answers. She should have been forewarned. As it was, when he bent his head, his lips found hers squarely. She turned her head, twisting to get away, and the kiss grazed off the corner of her mouth.

He didn't apologize. He wasn't embarrassed or contrite. He merely smiled, said, very low, "Good night, Jane."

Good night, Jane, his eyes seemed to re-

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peat. But what they alone added was: That's all right. I can wait.

The door of the elevator opened and she ran into the car. Into the very small hours of the New Orleans night, she could still feel the warmth of his breath on her face, the sting of his kiss.

But the next day it was as if nothing had happened. They attended the preview, and they took in the sights. Jerry was blithe and friendly and impersonal, and his touch on her arm, as he steered her about, was just light enough. By evening they were on the night plane back to Los Angeles.

JERRY CARRIED her bag upstairs to her apartment door.

"You needn't come in till tomorrow," he told her. He nodded good-bye, and left her there.

Jane let herself in, deposited the suitcase in the bedroom and hurriedly scooted out again. She could call Dell on the phone, she knew, but she wanted to see him, to be near him, to be able to hold him.

He was out on an ambulance case when she got to the hospital, but he returned in a short time. When Jane caught sight of his lean, white-garbed figure coming through the door of the visitors' waiting room, she had all she could do to keep from throwing herself into his arms.

"Baby, what's the matter?" he asked, taking her hands and leading her over to some chairs where they sat down.

"Nothing. I just . . . Oh, Dell, it's so good to be back. I missed you so!"

He glanced at his wrist-watch. "Sure, I know," he said. "I missed you, too. But honey, I've got work to do."

"Dell," she blurted. "When are we getting married?"

"What's eating you, anyway? You know when. In two months, soon as my internship's over. Then we'll grab ourselves a honeymoon—maybe in Hawaii if the loot holds out—and then it's back to Castroville."

"Back to Castroville," she echoed dully. And then she looked up and brightened. "Okay, Dell. Go back to work. I'm sorry I disturbed you. I just wanted to say hello."

"Say hello?" he grinned. "You kiss me hello, or nothing."

"Dell! Right here in the waiting room?"

"Sure. What do you think I've been waiting for?"

And then she was in his arms and her mouth was welded to his. It was short and sweet, but even for those few brief moments, all the dark clouds had sailed away from Jane's heaven.

She thought again of those words as she walked slowly away from the hospital. Back to Castroville. That wasn't the place for Dell. He belonged here, where excitement and glamour were to be had. Where the money was to be made. Where she belonged! Perhaps Dell couldn't see it her way yet, but that was only because he hadn't really been given the chance to.

She knew now, more resolutely than ever, that the answer to everything lay with Jerry Paxton. If he could get Dell in as advisor on those pictures then there would be no more talk of going back to Castroville.

All she had to do now was to make certain that Jerry got Dell the job. And the way to do that, she knew beyond a doubt, was to play up to the producer at every opportunity. If he wanted office relations nice and congenial, very well then. He'd have them that way. If he wanted to take her sightseeing when they were away on business trips, very well then. She'd look at the sights. It was little enough for him to ask, and it was little enough for her to do.

For Dell . . .

THE NEXT morning Jane showed up for work in her best gabardine suit and a frilly, peekaboo blouse. Jerry surveyed her calmly, his eyes gleaming their approval.

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He said, "Take a letter, Jane . . ."

It wasn't quite what she had expected of him, but . . . Jane sat down and made her shorthand notes.

And it was like that all the busy day through. Monday also found Jerry extremely efficient and businesslike, apparently impervious to the smiles and blandishments she served him. But on Tuesday, late afternoon, as she was handing him the last letter to be signed, he suddenly glanced up at her.

"Seeing the boy friend tonight?" he asked.

"Why, yes. Tuesday's Dell's night off."

"Too bad," he remarked offhandedly. "I was hoping you could be at my place for a conference I'm holding tonight. The big shots on that new medical series will be there. We'll be laying out our production notes on the pictures. That sort of stuff."

She sucked in her breath. Production notes on the pictures. That might mean the opening for Dell. Here was her chance, if she played her cards right.

"If it's that important," she murmured. "Of course. I'll be glad to come."

"You know," said Jerry softly. "I kind of thought you would."

Back in her office the phone was ringing.

"Let me talk to Jerry," a woman's voice said; a somehow familiar voice.

Jane was just about ready to leave. She poked her head in the inner office, announced, "There's a call for you," and retreated again.

As she was gathering up her purse and gloves, she heard Jerry's voice raised in heated argument. And it was then she remembered where she had heard that voice before. It was that insolent woman who had refused to give her name that other time.

Jane shrugged and went on out.

IT WAS TOO late to reach Dell by phone to call off their date. When she got back to the apartment, she had to dress swiftly, while Marcia lounged on the bed and regarded her with baleful glances.

"Don't forget, Marcia," she coached, running a comb through her hair. "Tell Dell that Mr. Paxton called a last-minute story conference and I have to be there."

Marcia winced. "Honey, you don't need any conference. That's a story in itself, if ever I heard one."

"Marcia! You know it's part of my work."

"Sure, sure. Why don't you just stay home and manufacture TNT in the bathtub. It's safer."

Jane was ready now. She wore a strawberry-patterned black silk damask dress with a matching bolero jacket. The short cut of her red-gold hair swirled capriciously around her pretty face.

"Tell Dell that I'll call him in the morning and that I think I'm going to have a big surprise for him. And you're an angel to let me have the car!"

Marcia waved her out. "Go ahead, go ahead. Don't mind the grumblings of an old spinster aunt."

Jane grabbed up her purse and coat and reached for the door. She opened it—and there stood Dell.

"You must be psychic," he said. "I didn't even ring."

"Dell!" She was plainly startled. "You're early."

"Mrs. Watkins presented Mr. W. with a seven-pound girl a little sooner than we thought she would, so here I am."

And then he seemed to become fully aware of her for the first time. His eyes traveled over her, and he let out a long whistle.

"Hey, pretty classy stuff, isn't it? I was planning on a movie. Now we'll have to sit in the loge seats."

"I was just going out, Dell," she said lamely. "I had left a message with Marcia for you."

The smile left his eyes. "What kind of a message?"

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"Well . . ." she took a deep breath. "That I had to go to work and couldn't see you tonight."

"Work? In those duds?"

"Mr. Paxton's having a story conference in his home," she told him. "He asked me to be there."

"But Jane, it's my one night off. All week I've been looking forward to it. And what's more, I got cheated out of last week when you went gallivanting off to New Orleans."

"I know, Dell, and I'm sorry. But it really is awfully important that I be there." She thought for a moment. "For both of us."

He tilted his head, eyed her appraisingly. "I don't get it," he said. "Seems like every time we want to go anyplace or do anything lately, you're tied up with work. How come you have to go to his house? What's this Paxton guy to you anyway?"

"Dell, please. The neighbors . . ." They were still standing, half in, half out of the hallway.

He swore. "Hang the neighbors. Are you going out with me tonight or aren't you?"

"I can't! You'll just have to trust me, darling. Honestly, it's for the best."

"Never mind the heroics," he said bluntly. "If you want to be that guy's overtime secretary, it's okay with me. I just hope you have a swell time-and-a-half!"

"Dell! It isn't like that at all."

"Isn't it?" he asked coolly. And then he turned and walked away.

She made a movement as if to follow him, but a touch on her arm stopped her.

"Don't," said Marcia softly from behind her. "He'll be back."

Jane turned on a weak smile. "Sure," she murmured. "He'll be back."

JERRY PAXTON'S house was built on one of Beverly Hills' luxuriant, palm-lined streets. It had a swimming pool, she knew, and lush, velvety-green lawns. Jane went quickly up the walk, more determined than ever that tonight she would wangle the advisory deal for Dell.

At her finger touch, chimes, clear and melodious, sounded somewhere in the house. She heard rapid footsteps coming to the door, and then it was swung open and Jerry was smiling at her.

"Come in, come in," he said heartily. "I was beginning to think you'd changed your mind."

Absentmindedly, she drew off her gloves and looked around. "Where's everybody?"

"Everybody?" he repeated, taking her coat. And even as he did so, she remembered something.

There had been no other cars parked in front of the house or in the driveway.

"Aren't they here yet?" she faltered. "The people for the conference?"

Jerry led her into a huge living room. He turned his back and busied himself at the bamboo-striped bar that stood beside the patio doors.

"Scotch or bourbon?" he asked.

"Nothing. Jerry, aren't they coming?"

And still he didn't answer her. When he turned around, he held a highball glass in each hand.

"Take it." It was an order.

With reluctant fingers she reached out for the glass. Its coldness felt soothing against her feverish palm.

"A toast," he said. "To us."

Jane didn't join him. She watched with stricken eyes as he downed his drink.

She set down the glass, and began desperately, "Jerry, if the others aren't coming, I'm going home."

"Sit down, Jane," he murmured. "Surely you couldn't be afraid."

Even more reluctantly she took a seat on the sofa. He planted himself next to her.

"But if the others aren't coming . . ." she tried again.

And then he smiled, broadly and amusedly, as if she had just told a funny joke.

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"WHAT DO you mean, *if* the others aren't coming? You know damn well they're not. Else why did you show up here tonight looking like an extremely desirable and extremely wayward angel?"

"Jerry!"

His arm slid along the sofa top in back of her. "You knew they weren't coming, baby," he said. "You knew that my wife was out of town, and that the only people at this party were going to be you and me."

"No!" Like a pale wraith she cowered in the corner of the couch. "I didn't!" she cried wildly. "I never thought . . . I never even knew you were married!"

He laughed. "That's what they all say." And then the laugh became an ugly sneer. "You wanted that job for your boy friend, all right. Sure. And you didn't mind throwing yourself at me in order to get it. In the office or in New Orleans, either. So what's so different about tonight? It's your golden opportunity, baby."

"I didn't," she whispered, but she knew, appallingly, that she had been throwing herself at Jerry. But never had she intended anything like this. Never this sort of thing!

"Come here," he commanded.

When she didn't move, he lunged forward, his eyes like glittering agates. He grabbed her shoulder. She struggled furiously, but he seemed charged with maniacal strength. His other hand went to her neck, slid up under her hair, and then he forced her head back and took possesion of her mouth.

It was a cruel kiss, hard and willful, and when she tried to wrench herself free, he only became more forceful.

Somewhere, there was a sharp click, as if a door had just been opened.

"Is this supposed to be where I say 'Cut!'" a woman's voice broke in jeeringly.

Jerry released her so suddenly she was flung back against the sofa pillow. A blonde girl was standing just inside the patio doors. A tall, shapely girl in a black satin suit. Her eyes were slits of pure malice; her beautiful face was contorted with hatred.

Jerry scrambled to his feet. "I can explain, darling . . ."

"I'll bet you can," the blonde snapped. It was that imperious voice Jane had twice heard on the telephone!

Oh, no, she thought fiercely. This couldn't be happening to me.

But it could, and it was, and now the blonde was swinging on her.

"So this is the rotten, cheap baggage you've been two-timing me with," she said disdainfully. She glanced at Jane with scorn. "Get out of here, you little . . ."

She raised her hand and brought it down viciously across Jane's face.

"Get out!" she spat.

Jane turned and blindly ran. Somehow, she remembered to retrieve her coat and purse from the table in the hall. Her high heels rat-tatted sharply over the flagstone-paved walk, but above their hurrying staccato and the frenzied beats of her heart, she could hear the harsh voices from the house, rising to hysterical pitches.

SHE GOT IN the car and sped off, and it wasn't till she was several blocks away, halted for a light, that she glanced in the rear-view mirror. Her lipstick was smeared, her hair was tumbled wildly, and across the paleness of her cheek were the livid souvenirs of fingerprints.

His wife, she thought dully. I should have known. And when she started up again, she saw that the sleeve of her bolero was ripped where Jerry had grabbed her.

Jinx . . . Jinx . . . the little voice inside her tolled. Everything you touch turns into dust and crumbles away.

What a little fool she had been. Trying to play a game with a man who made up his own rules. Trying to get something for nothing in a mercenary world.

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She braked in front of her apartment house and moved to get out of the car. And then she stopped.

Marcia had been right. Dell was back again.

He was sitting in his coupe, parked a little ways ahead of her. And now as she stared at him, he slid out and strode swiftly over. Jane got out of the car, her hands clammy and cold.

"I've been waiting for you," Dell began. "I wanted . . ."

He didn't get any further, and she knew that he was seeing what she had seen in the rear-view mirror.

"So it was like that," he said slowly. "You were out for some thrills, some . . ."

"No, Dell, no! I didn't know. Believe me, I didn't know!" She was clutching at his jacket now, her eyes begging him to understand, to forgive.

But there was no understanding, no forgiveness in the icy gray gaze that stabbed back at her. There was nothing but naked contempt.

Her fingers dropped lifelessly from him. She turned away.

"I did it for you," she said brokenly. "He was going to get you a job at the studio. It was going to be your chance of a lifetime . . ."

"What are you talking about?" he demanded. "What do you mean?"

Haltingly, she told him. How he was too important to be wasted on a small town like Castroville; how there was nothing there, nobody; how she had wanted so desperately this chance for him to get ahead with the right people.

"But I didn't mean it to go this far, I swear I didn't," she finished mournfully. "I—I was just being nice to him, so he'd be nice to us. You've got to understand, Dell!"

Once again, she turned anguished eyes appealing toward him. And once again, forgiveness was refused her.

"Sure I understand," Dell said softly. "Funny how I was too blind, too much in love with you to see things that way before."

"Dell, no . . ."

But he went ruthlessly on. "I wasn't good enough for you, is that it? Being a plain doctor's wife in a small town wasn't exactly your cup of tea." He gave a wry laugh. "But then how could it be? You were longing for champagne."

"For you, Dell," she could only repeat foolishly. "It was only for you."

"Thanks," he ground out. "Only it so happens I'm not having any."

LIKE A far-off cry, she could hear Aunt Lou's words: You've made our boy so happy . . . She felt the tears start up in her eyes, and bit down hard on her lower lip to keep from giving in to them. At her side her fists were clenched hard, and she felt her ring—Dell's ring—dig cruelly into her palm.

All at once, Dell was gripping her shoulders, and with a rough twist he pulled her to him.

"Not good enough for you, am I," he muttered. "I'll show you . . ."

He kissed her, a kiss that was stark and despising, devoid of all tenderness, of all sweetness. It lay as bitter as brine on her lips. And then he was gone.

Like a puppet whose legs are manipulated by strings beyond her control, Jane walked on inside and let herself into the apartment.

Marcia was curled up in the armchair under the reading lamp. Her hair was tied in rag curlers, and a hand holding a large red apple stopped midway to her mouth.

"For Pete's sake, what ran into you?"

Jane tried to say something. She opened her mouth, but the words just wouldn't come.

Marcia said, "Oh, you poor kid."

And it was then that the tears started to fall in earnest.

Later, armed with a flimsy lace handker-

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chief that Marcia had grabbed up at random from a dresser drawer, she told her roommate the whole story.

"I nearly died when his wife walked in," she confided. "She must have just come back from out-of-town. Oh, Marcia, it looked so—so cheap and tawdry!"

The other girl gave her a consoling hug. "Don't worry, honey. If that Paxton louse is anything like he's rumored to be, his wife's probably good and used to it by now."

"But Dell. He didn't understand. He didn't believe me."

Marcia said cheerily, "What did I tell you about Dell, honey? He'll be . . ."

"No, Marcia!" The words tore themselves from her. "This time he won't be back."

And the tears started anew.

THE NEXT morning Jane lifted her head from a tear-dampened pillow to find Marcia firmly anchoring her hat on her head in front of the vanity mirror.

"Going to work already?" she asked thickly.

"Already? It's after ten!" exclaimed Marcia. "We forgot to set the alarm last night." She came over to the bed, as Jane swung slim legs over the side. "I called the office and told them I had a bad 'code id der dose,' so now I'm on my way to the hairdresser's. You have yourself some breakfast. It's perking on the stove."

Jane threw her roommate a grateful smile. "I could use half a dozen cups."

Marcia was heading for the front door. "I'll be back soon. Don't let me catch you weeping in your coffee."

She went out. Jane groped for her slippers, found them and moved over to the mirror. She shuddered. She'd better get to that coffee. Fast.

The pot was on a low flame. A few slices of rye bread lay by the toaster, and she put them in. Then she turned on the kitchen radio.

Someone was warbling a love song. She couldn't stand that. Not the morning after her love song had ended. On the next station a soap opera held sway. She left that on and sat down to her coffee and toast.

It was somewhere during her second cup that she became aware that the serial had gone off. A newscaster was chanting the morning tidings, instead. She listened absently. Wars . . . government doings . . . a robbery downtown . . . a Hollywood producer's wife had committed suicide . . . *Suicide!*

AND THEN she was no longer listening absently. The announcer's voice was filling the room, swelling to a thunder that crashed down over her head.

"Mrs. Paxton, the former Adelaide King of Chicago, was found this morning by her maid who had come up to awaken her. A bottle containing three sleeping tablets was on the table by her bedside. The maid said that the bottle had been full yesterday morning . . ."

"Oh, no, no!" Jane said aloud, half rising from the table.

The newscaster droned on. "The police found a suicide note under Mrs. Paxton's pillow. She wrote she was taking her life because of her husband's attentions to another woman. 'Last night was the end,' she said in part. 'I can't take it any more.' Friends had assumed the producer's wife to be away in Las Vegas. For further details see your . . ."

But the coffee cup in Jane's nerveless fingers had shattered to the floor, and she heard no more of the announcer's statement.

Jerry's wife had committed suicide. She had left a note saying that she couldn't take any more, because of the other woman. And she, Jane—was that other woman!

She cradled her face in her hands, shivering. Murderess, taunted the silent accusation. Murderess, murderess, murderess . . . Blonde Adelaide Paxton would be

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alive this morning if it weren't for her.

Suddenly Jane knew that this time her jinx had played a double feature. Dell, and now Jerry's wife. Everything she touched . . . Everything she touched . . .

There could never be any forgiveness from Dell. Even now he might be hearing the news over the radio, reading it in his morning's paper. He'd know then about the other woman, and he'd shut Jane out of his heart and out of his arms forever.

She lifted her head and ran back into the bedroom. She had to get out of here before Marcia came back, before there were more questions, more meaningless consolations. Hastily, she took down a bag from the closet shelf, flung clothes into it. Then she began to dress, and she had the telephone to her ear even before both shoes and stockings were on her feet.

"I want a reservation," she told the girl at the other end of the line, at the airlines office. "Your first flight to New York. Anything will do!"

It had to be East. To the West was Hawaii and reminders of a honeymoon that would never be.

Marcia still hadn't returned by the time she was ready. She scribbled a note for her, thanking her for everything. And then, on impulse, left one for Dell. A very short one.

You know that crystal chandelier in the Cape Cod cottage? I think it's beautiful. Good-by, Dell, and it was so nice having loved you.

Jane

She had sent for a cab and it took her speedily to the bank where she cleaned out her savings account, and then to the airport, where the propellers were already spinning on Flight Number 116 for the East.

New York was still too close. She had to escape even farther. And finally, she took the one plane she could secure passage on. Bound for Puerto Rico, where a visa wouldn't be necessary.

So long, jinx! Jane thought, as the great silver wings bore her out over the sea, leaving New York's sparkling spires behind. Here's where you and I part company.

But, of course, she was wrong . . .

THE SKY was a cloudless, deep-hued azure, and after a while Jane tired of gazing at its limitless, unbroken expanse. Below was the water, alternately shimmering green and blue, still as a country pond from where she viewed it. There was nothing to look at there either.

Jane returned to the magazine she had purchased at the stand in the airlines terminal, and let her eyes wander over the pages of a mystery story. After another while, she gave that up, too, leaned back against the seat and closed her eyes.

"Milk or coffee with your dinner, Miss?"

She looked up. The stewardess was bending over her.

"Oh, thank you. Coffee will be fine."

June ate listlessly, wondering what she was going to do when she got to Puerto Rico. How she was going to live without Dell. She *would* live, of course, but it wouldn't be the same. It wouldn't be the house on the crest of a hill, and Dell across the breakfast table from her every morning. It wouldn't be love or happiness or heaven at all.

She looked out of the window again and saw the first star of the evening appear in the twilight sky, shining like a diamond in a huge pink-streaked setting. Jane's fingers stole to the ring on her left hand, the ring she had been unable to leave behind and covered it.

"Star light, star bright . . ." she began softly. And then stopped. What was the use.

It was then that it happened.

There was a funny cough and sputtering which broke up the monotonous drone of

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the engines. Then the plane shuddered once and the sputtering stopped—and so did the engines. The big plane nosed down slightly, the wind screeching by the motionless propellers. The hostess raced up the aisle, helping passengers fasten their safety belts. A red light shone up above the pilots' compartment as a warning to all; a warning not one of the passengers needed.

"Are we going to land?" someone asked excitedly.

Jane heard a woman sobbing behind her. Someone else said, "Shut up!"

The co-pilot came out just then. He stood up at the front of the plane, under the warning light, his hands braced on the side panels of the door.

"Please try and be calm, everybody," he said. And then he smiled reassuringly. "We're going to have to land. Now when we tell you that the life rafts have been released, I want you all to get into them nice and orderly, and there'll be no trouble. There's plenty of time, and plenty of room for everybody."

The man across the aisle from Jane shook his head. "I've been flying for the last fifteen years, and this is the first time anything like this has happened to me."

Jane could have told him why. She knew the truth with a sudden flash of fearful insight. She hadn't left the jinx behind her at all. It had been flying with her all the way, and now it was back at work.

Behind her the woman was sobbing again. Jane turned and saw that she held a little boy of perhaps four in her lap.

She smiled at him coaxingly. "What's your . . ."

JANE NEVER finished. The plane hit the water hard. Someone screamed. Then it rebounded off the waves, hit again. Rebounded and hit. Rebounded and hit. . . . Jane thought the jolting would never stop. They'd never settle.

But they did, eventually. And then there was the confused blur of ragged conversation, the pilots releasing the rubber lifeboats, passengers clambering into them with pinched, frightened faces.

Then there was the weird, ghostly scene of the boats stringing themselves out on the inky water, and the plane bobbing behind them, slipping lower and lower into the depths from which there was no return, until, at last, it disappeared from sight.

And then there was only the night, silent and black, everywhere around them.

It was like something out of a badly staged dream, Jane thought. The characters unreal, the setting unearthly, and the audience the strange, fearful host of the unknown. Somehow—she never knew when it started—she found herself joining in some songs. But even that was eerie—to have the melody floating out into that blank wall of darkness.

The little boy and his mother were in Jane's boat, and she kept busy talking to the youngster, telling him stories, playing impromptu, made-up games. The night was cold and damp. The rafts tossed like corks on the watery swells. Somehow the hours passed, each one half an eternity long.

And then someone cried, "Look!"

Jane turned, and her heart contracted with horror. There cutting the water, not ten yards away from their boat, were glistening, triangular fins. Sharks—the vultures of the sea! After that, they were never gone, but kept circling around the boats, round and round, patiently waiting—as if they knew best of all just how long their vigil would be.

But the welcome light of dawn finally traced its way into the sky, and with it came the faint but unmistakable hum of engines overhead.

"It's a plane! They're searching for us!"

And it was a plane. It flew over them, then dipped its wings, circled twice and soared back.

"They've found us," the boy's mother

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murmured, with weary, unutterable relief. "We'll be picked up soon."

The ordeal was over for Jane. She had tried to run away, to keep from facing the music—and now she was going back.

The hours on the open sea had taught their lesson well. After every hurt you caused, there always had to be a reckoning. After playing with fireworks, always a fifth of July. There could never be any escaping.

The Canadian destroyer fished them out of the water a little after noon. They were landed in Bermuda early the next morning.

BERMUDA—isle of coral beaches and turquoise sea and golden sun. Yes, Bermuda may mean many things to many people. But to Jane Ballard, it meant—heartbreak.

"Miss . . ." the reporter was saying. "I don't think you heard me. I asked how does it feel to be alive?"

But the tall, almost too thin man was at her side now. He grabbed her hand, took one hungering look, then crushed her to him.

"You shouldn't, Dell." she whispered.

"Baby, if you only knew how frantic I've been ever since I saw your name on the passenger list in the papers. And then I nearly broke my neck getting here on time when the news came out that you'd been picked up." He stopped for breath. "Why'd you do it? Why'd you run away?"

She turned her head, not wanting to look at him. "I'm no good, Dell. Everything I touch crumbles to dust."

"What are you talking about?" he demanded roughly. "Everything's okay now, baby. I was the crazy one."

She shook her head. "No, you still don't understand. Jerry Paxton's wife committed suicide, Dell, because of me. Didn't Marcia tell you? His wife walked in on us that night . . ." Her voice broke.

"Jane, look at me," Dell said sternly. "First of all, there's no such thing as a jinx. You never had one and you don't have one now."

She put up her hand, but he silenced her with a shake of his head. He asked, "What color hair did Jerry Paxton's wife have?"

She relived the whole shameful scene, in those few fleeting seconds. "She was a blonde. I'll always remember."

"I've got news for you, baby. Adelaide Paxton was a brunette. She had dark hair, Jane. Real dark hair."

"But she . . ." And then full realization struck her. Only, if it hadn't been Jerry's wife who had slapped her, then who was it?

Dell smiled as if he had been tuned in to her thoughts. He said, "The blonde was Jerry's—uh—how shall I put it?"

But he didn't have to put it. Jane skipped back to those two telephone calls. She understood now who the blonde was; she saw the leading part she had played in the whole sordid tragedy; she was the other woman!

"It came out in the papers." Dell went on casually. "In the suicide note she said that she was sick and tired of all her husband's philandering, and that she knew all about the latest blonde. Seems she caught them together when she returned later that night."

"Oh Dell." And then she was laughing and crying all at once, and she was being wrapped up in his arms, and he was kissing her.

"As long as we're here," he whispered, "how about making this our honeymoon? I've already cabled Hotchkiss we're taking that cottage." She nodded, too filled with joy to speak.

"Uh, Miss Ballard," an irritated voice broke in. "This has all been very—uh—interesting. But for the last time . . . how does it feel to be alive?"

Jane said, softly, "Why, simply won . . ."

But Dell's seeking lips wouldn't let her finish. The reporter gave a philosophical shrug, tore up his notes, and walked noiselessly away.

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Ann saw Jim's quick glance up and down the street. The thought hit her that she might be in trouble with the police.

Heart in Flight

By
VELDA JOHNSTON

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A key that was a clue to murder opened the door to love for Ann.

Synopsis

BEAUTIFUL *Ann Marleigh,* daughter of a once wealthy New York family, has been worried and upset over her younger brother, *Gordon,* who drinks heavily. Things come to a climax one night when Ann goes to bring him home from a cheap Times Square Hotel. At the hotel she finds that he is sleeping, and she decides to spend the night there in order to be near him if he should awaken. That night, she has a particularly horrifying and vivid nightmare. She dreams that someone comes to her room and takes her off to a strange masquerade party. There are three people at the party who stand out—a green merinaid who wants to tell Ann something; a bear who tries to prevent her;

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and a pirate with an S-shaped scar on his neck who helps Ann escape when the mermaid is killed with a pair of shears and her body hidden in a closet.

The next day Ann's terror mounts when she discovers a strange key in her purse and a vial of perfume that does not belong to her. Hysterically she begins to wonder—and then to be convinced—that somewhere in New York, locked in a closet, is the body of a woman whom she has killed!

In desperation she goes back to the hotel, determined to retrace her steps of the night before. In the lobby she meets *Larry Gretson*, whose father owns the hotel. Ann feels that Larry is curious about her presence there, but he asks no questions. There is a man who d s ask, though —*Jim Hastings*, police reporter for the *New York Chronicle*. Ann had met and been attracted to Jim at a party given by her wealthy, eccentric friend, *Clyde Cavanaugh*.

Ann tells Larry about her nightmare, and he is so reassuring that she decides that she is being overly dramatic about it and should simply forget it. She is a little upset, though, by Jim Hastings, who has overheard her telling Larry, and shows a keen interest in the key and the perfume. She refuses to show them to him, however.

In the days that follow, Jim and she become good friends and he never again refers to her dream. But he does ask her about Gordon—how long he has been drinking and how friendly he is with Clyde Cavanaugh. Little by little, Ann falls in love with him, and they finally decide to get married. Then one day Ann comes home early and hears Jim and her brother Gordon fighting bitterly. Jim refuses to tell Ann what the quarrel is about, and angrily she accepts a date with Larry who has been calling her. From her brother, Ann learns that Jim had a sister whom Gordon had once loved. Jim's sister, Mary, had been involved in a hit and run automobile accident, but had wrecked the car and been killed before the police caught up with her. From certain letters he found among her things, Jim was convinced that Gordon had been with her the day of the accident, had actually been driving the car, and had abandoned the wreck in which Mary was killed in order to escape the blame. Heartsick, Ann realizes that it was from the date of the accident—four years before—that Gordon had started drinking. On top of this, she learned that Gordon has been cashing the bonds that they had both inherited and that there is little money left.

That night, still angry at Jim for not telling her this himself, and a little fearful that he had been deliberately pursuing her because of Gordon, Ann goes out with Larry. She is astonished to find him not his usual gay self. Instead, he is nervous, irritable and worried. After dinner he says there is something he must tell her and suggests that they find a quiet spot in Central Park where they will not be overheard. Ann's suspicion is aroused at this, and even more so when Larry acts fearful that someone might be following them. And then, in the park, he slips and falls. He has cut the back of his head. Ann, in an attempt to help him, loosens his collar. There on the back of his neck is a raised scar in the shape of an S! Instantly she is back in the horror of her nightmare. It was true—it had been no dream! Before Larry can say a word to her, she turns from him in terror and runs. *Now go on with the story.*

Conclusion

SHE AWOKE at noon the next day after less than five hours sleep. Until nearly three the night before she'd kept calling Jim's apartment, needing desperately to pour out her confused fear, needing to hear him say, "Hold on, darling. I'll be right over."

But Jim hadn't answered his phone. At last, deciding that he was out covering some late-breaking story, she had gone to bed. She hadn't slept though. The darkness had been alive with the memory of that S-shaped scar on Larry Gretson's neck. She didn't try to decide what to do about her discovery that Larry had been the man in the pirate costume in her supposed nightmare. Jim would tell her what to do. Jim, she felt, was capable of handling anything. The thought brought her comfort, but even so she didn't fall asleep until after her dressing table mirror had reflected the first reddish rays of the sun.

Now, as she sat up in bed, her head began to throb. She got up, slipped on her robe, and went into the bathroom. The aspirin bottle in the medicine cabinet was empty. She stood there for a moment, fingertips against her throbbing temples. She wouldn't be able to even think straight until she got rid of this headache. Well, Gordon could go to the drugstore for aspirin.

She went back into the bedroom and opened the door into the hall. The door opposite stood open, revealing the empty room, the unmade bed.

In the downstairs hall the vacuum cleaner whined. She went to the bannister and looked down at the part-time maid's untidy head. "Mrs. Talbot!"

Shutting off the vacuum, the woman turned her surly face upward. Ann asked, "Do you know where my brother is?"

"Out. Went out half an hour ago."

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"Then could you run down to the drugstore and get some aspirin. My head's splitting. And deliveries take so long."

"I'm paid to clean, not run errands."

Ann turned away from the bannister. She'd get the aspirin herself.

Fifteen minutes later she left the house, walked two blocks through the mid-day sunlight to the drugstore. She never did get the aspirin, though, because next to the drugstore was a little tobacco shop with the day's newspapers displayed on a rack outside. Automatically she glanced at them. One black headline covered the front page of the tabloid *Messenger:*

HOTEL TYCOON'S SON STABBED TO DEATH IN CENTRAL PARK

The letters seemed to dance before her eyes as she lifted the paper from the rack, turned to the first inside page.

IT HAD BEEN Larry, all right. A woman walking her dog at dawn in the park had glimpsed his body as it lay in some bushes at the edge of the Seventy second Street lake, and had screamed until she had attracted the attention of two of the park's patrolmen. Larry had been stabbed in the back, probably with a long-bladed pocket knife. His overcoat was found on a park bench nearby. There was no evidence of robbery, and no sign of a struggle, except for a slight cut behind his right ear, and a loosened tie and collar.

Dazedly she turned, her headache forgotten now, and started away. "Hey, Miss!" a voice hailed her from the shop doorway. "You didn't pay for the paper you took."

She turned back, reached automatically into her purse, laid a nickel in his outstretched hand, and turned toward home.

She felt a grinding sense of guilt. She had left Larry there in the park, half-dazed from his fall. And someone had crept up on him through the windy dark and plunged a knife into his back.

Why? Probably, she realized now, because someone feared that he was going to tell her the truth about the tenement flat of her nightmare. But he'd never had a chance to tell her, because as soon as she had seen the scar on his neck she had fled in terror and revulsion, leaving him at the mercy of his enemy.

What enemy? It must have been the person he was afraid of last night, the person for whom he had kept glancing over his shoulder, as if he feared he had been followed from the Chateau Yquem.

She stopped short there on the sidewalk, the paper clutched in her hand. Jim had known Larry would be at the Chateau Yquem. He had heard her making the date with Larry. And over dinner Larry had tried to warn her against Jim, had suggested that it was unwise of her to trust him. She had attributed his attitude to jealousy, but now . . .

"No!" she said aloud. "Not Jim!"

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But even as she spoke she was remembering Larry's last, labored words to her. "Meant to tell you it wasn't a dream," he had said. "Decided I had to. That clipping . . ."

He could have meant only one clipping, the one he had shown her, the one through which he had learned that she was seeing Jim. The clipping had made him feel that she was in danger, so much so that he had decided to tell her the truth about her supposed nightmare, even though the truth would undoubtedly be to his own discredit.

A passing couple stared at her as she stood there, her face dazed and pale in the harsh sunlight, the paper crumpled in her hand. She walked on. Had it been only twenty minutes ago that she had taken comfort in the thought of Jim's love, of his arms around her and his voice soothing her, telling her what to do? Desperately she tried to hold onto her confidence in him and in his love. Jim, she told herself, just couldn't have had any connection with the events in that nightmarish tenement flat. But it was no use. She felt as she had the morning after her supposed dream—alone, unable to trust anyone, threatened by an evil whose nature she could not guess.

She turned in at her gate. As she climbed the porch steps, she remembered something else. Jim hadn't been in his apartment last night. Where had he been? She had a swift, sickening vision of him following her and Larry along the shadowed path, moving close to its edge so that he could slip behind a tree whenever Larry glanced back.

She opened the front door, stepped into the hall. The vacuum cleaner's whine came from the library now. Just as she reached the foot of the stairs, the telephone on the hall table rang.

SOMEHOW knowing whose voice she would hear, she picked up the phone. "Hello."

"Ann," Jim said, "I've got to see you."

She was surprised at the evenness of her own voice. "All-right."

"I just now woke up, but I can be there in twenty minutes."

"All right," she said again, and hung up.

She went into the library. Above the vacuum's whine she said, "Never mind finishing that, Mrs. Talbot. You can go now."

"Look. You promised me four hours work each time I . . ."

"I know. And it's not your fault you're not staying this time, so you'll be paid the full amount."

Mrs. Talbot looked long and curiously at Ann's stricken face, at the paper still clutched in her hand. Then, shrugging, she flipped the lever on the vacuum and walked over to disconnect the cord.

Mrs. Talbot had left the house by the time that Ann, watching from the living room windows, saw Jim's gray coupe stop at the curb. Her mouth dry, her heart pounding, she walked into the hall and opened the front door as he came up the steps.

His face looked tired in the bright sunlight, but his blue eyes were smiling. He said, "Hello, beautiful."

She swallowed to ease the dryness of her mouth. "Come in, Jim. We can talk in the den."

She walked ahead of him to the little room off the library, closed the door behind them. "Sit down, Jim."

He didn't seem to hear her. Looking down at her face, pale and strained as she sat in one of the leather arm chairs, he said, "You're still upset about my trouble with Gordon yesterday, aren't you?"

For a moment she didn't know what he was talking about. In her shock over Larry Gretson's death, she'd almost forgotten the quarrel between Jim and her brother yesterday afternoon.

Jim sat down in the armchair opposite her, leaned forward earnestly. "Listen, darling, I thought this thing out thoroughly

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last night, and I decided that it was pretty stiff-necked of me not to tell you yesterday what the trouble was all about."

"You don't have to tell me," she said, her voice flat. "Gordon told me. Four years ago your sister killed a boy in a hit-and-run accident, and then smashed into a telephone pole and was killed. Somehow you got the notion that it was Gordon driving the car that night, just because you found some torn-up letters in her fireplace that might have been from him."

His face hardened a little. "I found one letter she *didn't* tear up, evidently the last letter she ever got from him. Want to see it?"

HE TOOK out his wallet, handed her a folded sheet of paper. As she opened it she noticed that the paper was slightly yellowed, and the creases worn. She read the brief, typewritten paragraph:

Dear Mary:

Received your letter. Since you insist, I'll drive up to New Haven Tuesday night, but don't see any point in it. As I told you over the phone four nights ago, I've been engaged for sometime to a girl here in New York. You and I've had a nice time together these past few months, and no harm done, so why try to drag the thing out? Why can't we part friends?

It was signed with a typewritten G. She read the brief, brutal note twice, and then handed it back to Jim. Silently she acknowledged that Gordon *could* have written such a letter. Like many weak and self-indulgent people, he could be ruthless with those whose love for him made them vulnerable to his cruelty. But that didn't mean Gordon *had* written it. Anyone could have typed that note. Jim could have done it for some purpose of his own. Don't trust him, she told herself.

Jim said, his voice tinged with bitterness, "Perhaps you noticed that although he says he'd been engaged to another girl for some time, he hadn't bothered to tell Mary about it until four nights before he wrote this letter. And I suppose you noticed that the letter was dated the twelfth, which was a Sunday, and that he wrote that he'd see her Tuesday. The accident was Tuesday night.

"But that isn't my chief reason for believing that it wasn't Mary driving the car that night," he went on. "My chief reason is that I *knew* her. She never drove fast, and she was about the most tender-hearted person I've ever known. She would never have hit that boy and then just driven on. I figure that Gordon was driving—back to New Haven from some roadhouse where they'd gone to talk—and that he was driving fast because he was drunk or mad or both.

"But I thought the whole thing through last night, and I decided that nothing, not even the satisfaction of forcing Gordon to admit the truth, would be worth risking my happiness with you. I want to forget the whole thing. I've talked this much about it only because I want you to realize why I felt so bitter toward Gordon—and toward you, too, at first, until I found out that you weren't at all like him, and probably didn't know anything about him and Mary.

"She was such a nice kid, Ann. Gay and high-spirited and yet gentle. And she was only eighteen, just the age to fall hard for a handsome guy like Gordon. She never wrote to me about being in love. I had no idea that there had been anyone special in her life until I read those torn-up letters. I suppose he'd persuaded her that, for one reason or another, it was necessary to keep it a secret. She was just trusting enough to believe any sort of story he'd tell her."

He paused momentarily, and then burst out, "She was my sister, Ann, and she was a nice kid. If she had to die, she deserved to die clean, not with a coroner's verdict

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that she'd killed a boy and then driven on."

She looked at him steadily. Did he really believe that Gordon had deceived his sister while she was alive, and after her death had shifted to her the responsibility for a contemptible crime?

YESTERDAY, even though she might not have been fully convinced of Gordon's guilt, she would have believed in Jim's good faith, and her understanding and sympathy would have gone out to him. But today everything had changed. Today there was that newspaper with the black headline hidden in the desk drawer a few inches from her hand. That headline made her distrust anything he might say.

She said crisply, "I'm sorry about your sister's death. And I'm sorry for Gordon's part in it—if he really did have a part in it. But as you say, all that happened a long time ago. We have something of more immediate importance to discuss." She paused. "Have you seen this afternoon's paper?"

There was puzzlement in his eyes. "Why, no. I'd just woke up when I called you, and I hurried over here so fast I had no time for anything but a cup of coffee. What is it, Ann?" he asked, his voice sharpening. "What's happened?"

For answer she opened the desk drawer, handed him the newspaper. He looked at the headline, lifted startled eyes to her face, and then turned to the inside page. She watched him as he read. Either he was a very good actor, or until now he had known nothing of Larry Gretson's death, because his face reflected only shocked, troubled surprise.

He said, foreboding in his voice, "Are you mixed up in this, Ann? Were you with him when it happened?"

"No. I left him in the park last night and came home alone." She paused, and then said swiftly, "Where were *you* last night?"

"Ann!" His voice sounded stunned. He reached over and covered her hand with his. "What are you driving at?"

His touch, reminding her of how last night she had counted so much on his love, his reassurance, made her feel weak. She jerked her hand away from his. "I want to know where you were! I called your apartment half a dozen times between midnight and three o'clock."

"I was at a bar! Several bars, if you must know. It wasn't until I left the last one, along about four o'clock closing time, that I decided to hell with trying to get even with Gordon, to hell with anything that could come between me and my girl. Ann, you can't believe I had anything to do with Gretson's death! Why should I want to kill him?"

"I don't know. I just know that while we were having dinner he tried to warn me against you. He said he didn't think it was a good idea for me to see so much of you."

"Of course he didn't. He wanted you to see a lot of him."

"It wasn't just that. He was afraid of something. When we walked through the park he kept looking back over his shoulder. He was going to tell me something. And I think he was killed to keep him from telling me."

Jim's voice was sharp. "To keep him from telling you what?"

"That it wasn't a nightmare I had at the Sayville Hotel that night. It was real!" Her voice was high and fast now. "I know it was real, because I saw the scar on his neck, the same scar that the man in the pirate costume had in my dream. It was . . ."

"Take it easy!" Then, more quietly: "Tell me exactly what happened last night."

SHE TOLD HIM. The dinner at the Chateau Yquem. Larry's uneasy manner. Their walk through the park. Her discovery of the scar on his neck, and then

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her wild flight back over the shadowed path to the safety of Central Park West.

"He was going to tell me the truth about that night at the Sayville. I know he was because after I'd seen the scar on his neck and blurted out that I knew it hadn't been a dream, he said, 'I meant to tell you. I decided I had to. That clipping . . .' And then I jerked away from him and ran."

Jim said, in that same sharp voice, "What clipping did he mean?"

"A clipping about you. A clipping from a gossip column saying you and I had been going around together. It was because I was seeing you that he felt he had to tell me the truth. But someone killed him to make sure he wouldn't. Maybe someone who followed us from the Chateau Yquem." She paused, and then said swiftly. "*You* knew I was meeting him there."

His face was very pale now. He said, his voice grim, "I haven't the slightest idea why finding out that you and I have been seeing each other would make Larry want to tell you the truth about that night at the Sayville. And as for my knowing where you were to meet him last night, others could have known, too, including your brother."

"Gordon? He didn't know. I didn't tell him."

"He was alone here in the den when you made the date with Gretson over the hall phone. And there's an extension phone right there on the desk."

Her eyes darted to the phone, then to his face. She said, her voice shaking, "Are you accusing my brother of doing anything so . . ."

"You're the one who started the accusing. I'm just showing you how easy it is. And it would be a lot easier to hang this on your brother than on me. Newspapermen can throw a lot of weight in this town, when they want to. And Gordon hasn't been exactly a solid citizen these past four years."

She stared at him bitterly. "Larry once called you a bully and a blackmailer. He was right. You don't want me to go to the police, and so you're threatening to involve Gordon in all this."

"You bet I don't want you to go to the police! Do you know who would be the first suspect? You! You were alone with him there in the park. And if you say he was still alive when you ran away, they'll ask why you ran. Then you'll either have to lie, or to tell them you were afraid because of another murder you and Gretson were involved in a week ago. And there *was* a murder a week ago. The fact that Gretson was killed last night makes me sure of it."

He paused and then said, "Don't you see you're up to your ears in trouble? It won't take the police long to find out there was a girl with Gretson last night. The waiters at the restaurant will notify the police as soon as they see his picture in the paper.

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So will the cab driver who took you to the park. You're going to let me try to straighten this thing out before the police get hold of you. You're going to do just as I say, and if it takes what you call bullying and blackmail to make you do it, then that's what I'll use." After a moment he added, "Now I want you to tell me all over again everything you can remember about the dream you had at the Sayville that night."

FOR A LONG moment she looked at his hard, determined face. Could she trust him? Suddenly she realized she had no alternative. As he had said, a newspaperman, particularly one connected with the politically powerful *Chronicle,* had a lot of influence. He knew enough about her to have her behind bars in twenty minutes, if he chose to. Nor would there be any point in refusing to discuss that nightmarish party in the coldwater flat. If he were involved in the case, he already knew the details better than she did. And if he weren't, if he were really trying to protect and help her now, then together they might uncover some significant point she had overlooked.

He said, "Talk fast, Ann. We haven't much time."

Hands clasped in her lap, she went over the story, from the time she had opened the door to see the shadowy figure in the turned-down hat brim standing in the hall at the Sayville, to the time the man in the pirate costume had led her through tenement flat's kitchen door to the fire escape.

At last Jim said flatly, "You must have been drugged."

"But I couldn't have been! I was all right when I went to the hotel that night, and I didn't eat or drink anything after I got there."

"Just the same, you must have been drugged. Otherwise you'd never have left the hotel in the middle of the night, with a man whose face you couldn't even see. Now think, Ann. Haven't you left out something? We know now that the man in the pirate costume was Larry Gretson, but can't you remember anything that might tell us who the others were, or where that coldwater flat is?"

Tensely she shook her head. "I've told you everything. No, wait. The next day, when I went over the whole thing in my mind, I had the feeling that I'd done something, something important, just before I went to bed, but try as I would I couldn't remember what it was. And another thing. In my purse the next morning, along with that key, I found a small glass vial with a glass stopper. It was empty, but it had had perfume in it. A kind of perfume I never wore in my life."

"What did you do with the vial?"

"It's in the drawer of my dressing table."

"Get it. And get that key, too."

She stood up, left the room. When she came back in a few minutes later she silently handed him the small bottle. He took out the stopper, sniffed. "Do you recognize this perfume?"

"No, and I know most of the leading brands."

He said, staring at the vial, "This is where the drugs came from, Ann. Out of this bottle, probably in capsules. You swallowed them before you went to bed that night at the Sayville. That's the important thing you did, but couldn't quite remember."

"But why should I have taken drugs I didn't even know I had? And if I took them, why can't I remember it?"

He slipped the vial into his pocket. "I don't know."

Going to the desk, he picked up the phone. As he dialed, Ann asked, "Who are you calling?"

"The lab at police headquarters." Then, into the phone: "Is that you, Al?— This is Hastings, of the *Chronicle.* Say, Al, if I brought you a bottle that had had perfume in it, could you give me an idea of

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the ingredients just by the smell?— Cut the wisecracks. This is important.—Well, do you know anyone who could?" He pulled a memo pad toward him, scribbled on it. "Thanks, Al," he said, and hung up.

He stood there for a moment more, then lifted the phone again and dialed. "Doc?" he said finally. "This is Hastings, of the *Chronicle*. Any unidentifieds in the last few days?—No, women.—Yesterday, huh? Well, what's the dope so far?—Okay, Doc. I'll call you back later for a full report."

HE HUNG up and turned to Ann. His face was pale, but his voice was quiet, controlled. "I'm going to call this chemist who specializes in perfume. The police lab says he may be able to tell us where it came from. While I'm telephoning, you'd better get your coat. W've got to get out of here before you have callers."

When she came downstairs a few minutes later, her face whiter than ever above her dark coat, he was waiting in the hall. "The man I want to see isn't in his office right now," he said. "I'll park you someplace and then go and wait for him."

They left the house. As Jim opened the gate she saw his quick glance up and down the street. For the first time the thought that she might be in serious trouble with the police really hit her. She imagined the official car stopping at the curb; the men with the noncommittal faces walking up to the front door.

Jim handed her into the gray coupe. For several blocks they drove in silence. Then she burst out, "What if *I* killed that woman in the mermaid costume?"

His voice was rough. "Don't talk nonsense."

"But what if I did? Those scissors were in my hand."

"Someone put them there. You were drugged. You didn't know what was happening."

"But that's just it. If I were drugged, I might have done it."

He said quietly, after a long moment, "All right, maybe you killed her. Cocaine or heroin can do funny things to people. But let's not cross that bridge until we come to it."

He drove in silence for another few blocks. Then he said worriedly, "I wish I could figure out a safe place to leave you. My apartment's no good. If your brother happens to be home when the cops come he'll tell them you may be out with me, and so my apartment will be the first place they'll look."

Ann said sickly, knowing for the first time in her life what it felt like to be hunted, "How about some café?"

"No. Even after the chemist gets back to his lab it may take him some time to give his report. You'd be conspicuous, waiting alone in a restaurant for an hour or more. And in the meantime the later editions of the papers may come out with your picture."

His voice trailed off. Then, as he waited for the traffic light at Forty-second Street to change, he said, "Got it! The public library. Go in the genealogy room. The people in there are too busy tracing dead ancestors to notice anyone who's walking around alive."

He drove over to Fifth, stopped before the broad steps with their flanking marble lions. "Wait for me and keep your chin up," he said.

FIVE MINUTES later she sat at a long table in the genealogy room, head bent over a copy of *History of Bucks County*. The only other person at the table, a dried-up little man with a pince-nez, had given her an annoyed look as she sat down, and then returned his attention to the charts and periodicals spread out before him.

She ready automatically with no idea of what she read. She felt physically sick with inner conflict. Desperately she wanted to trust Jim, wanted to believe that he loved her and was racing against time to discover

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the truth before she fell into the hands of the police. But her doubts of him remained. Where was he going now? She couldn't be sure he had even telephoned a chemist because she had been upstairs putting on her coat when he supposedly made the call. And was it for her sake or his own that he had been so anxious to keep her away from the police?

The minutes dragged past. Sometimes, when she remembered to, she turned a page. Once she got up, replaced *Bucks County,* and took down another book at random. Outside the long windows the light of the brief November afternoon was beginning to fade. The little man with the pince-nez replaced his charts in his briefcase, returned the periodicals to the desk, and left the room.

The overhead lights came on. Ann felt a cold, despairing certainty. Jim wasn't coming back. Long since he had taken a train from Grand Central or a plane from La Guardia Field. And she would sit here until some strange man with a hard, controlled face should tap her on the shoulder and say, "Ann Marleigh? Come with me."

Someone was walking toward her chair. Her head jerked up. Jim looked down at her with a smile which only emphasized the tension in his blue eyes.

Her relief was so great that she wanted more than anything in the world to throw herself in his arms and raise her lips for his kiss. Instead she got up silently, replaced the book on the reference shelf, and walked with him from the room.

AS THEY went down the wide front steps into the early dark, Jim said, "I'm sorry I was gone so long. It didn't take the chemist five minutes to give an opinion after he got there, but I had to wait two hours for him. He says that the base of the perfume that was in the bottle isn't French. It's Arabic. And there's only one man in New York who imports that particular base and blends perfume from it."

He opened the door of the gray coupe. Ann asked, "Where are we going?"

"Down to the importer's, a Mr. Christopolous. His place is on Hester Street on the lower East Side."

The car moved down Fifth Avenue, past the jewel-like windows of the fashionable shops, to where Fifth Avenue crosses Broadway. Following Broadway east, they stopped, finally, just a stone's throw from the Bowery.

Mr. Christopolous' shop, a tiny place with a long counter displaying bottles of perfume, was two doors from the corner. As they entered, a short, swarthy man appeared from behind a curtain at the rear of the room. "I'm not taking any more orders tonight," he said.

"We're not customers," Jim answered. "We just want some information. Are you Mr. Christopolous?"

The man's dark eyes regarded them warily. "I am."

Jim took the glass vial from his pocket, held it out. "Did you blend this perfume?"

Mr. Christopolous unstoppered the bottle, bent his dark head over it. "Yes, I blended this for one of my customers."

"Would you mind telling us who?"

"Sorry. I don't divulge information concerning my customers."

Jim took a bill from his wallet, creased it, and held it on the counter between his first two fingers. "Would this change your mind?"

"Mrs. Irene Vilnos, eighteen East Sixty-first Street," he said. He had deftly picked up the bill and pocketed it before he added, "But you won't find her there. I think she went to Europe six months ago."

Taking Ann's arm, Jim led her out to the sidewalk. "Do you know this Vilnos woman?" he asked.

"I met her once at Clyde Cavanaugh's. She looked like the sort of woman who'd wear a perfume like that—you know, dark, exotic, lots of jewelry."

"Come on."

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He led her to the tobacco store on the corner and went into the phone booth. When he emerged he was frowning. "Maybe she is in Europe. Her phone has been disconnected."

"Clyde might know where she is."

"We'll try him, anyway."

TWENTY minutes later, they stopped before Clyde's tall brownstone on the upper East Side. As usual, the house was blazing with lights from top to bottom. Horace, Clyde's houseman, opened the door as soon as they rang.

"Hello, Horace. Is Mr. Cavanaugh in?" Ann asked.

"Not at the moment, Miss Marleigh." As always, Ann was struck by the contrast between his villainous visage, with its flattened nose and small, squinty eyes, and the polite precision of his speech. "I expect him back shortly, though."

"Do you mind if we wait in the den?"

He hesitated momentarily, glancing at Jim, and then said, "I suppose that would be all right, Miss Marleigh."

With Jim she climbed the two flights of stairs to the huge, brilliantly-lighted room which Clyde called his den. Jim said, looking about him curiously, "If he isn't home, why are all the lights on?"

"It's one of his phobias. He can't stand walking into a darkened room. He's never been to the movies because of it."

"Are you sure? If I ever saw a room that was early Cecil B. De Mille, this is it. Chinese chairs, Persian rugs, African masks on the walls, crimson silk curtains, jade elephants . . ."

Abruptly he broke off, saying "What's outside those windows?"

Her pulses quickened in response to something in his face. "A balcony."

Striding across the room, he opened one of the long French doors hidden by the crimson silk draperies and closed it behind him. When he came back in a moment later his face looked hard and grim.

"Jim! What is it?"

"I think I know where your tenement flat is."

She whispered sickly, "Where?"

"Come on. We'll see if I'm right."

They went down the long flights of stairs. Horace stood in the library doorway, his ex-pugilist's face upturned to watch their descent. "You've decided not to wait, Miss Marleigh?"

Jim answered for her. "We've forgotten something. We may be back, though."

They went down the steps and got into the car. At the corner Jim turned right, drove half a block, and then, to her surprise, eased the car into the curb. "We can walk from here," he said.

Ann didn't answer. Her mouth felt dry, her throat constricted. They walked to the drugstore on the corner, turned right along the street one block south of Clyde's. As often happens in New York, where slum children play stickball within sight of swankily uniformed apartment house doormen a few hundred feet away, this street was very different from the one a block north. Garbage cans stood at the curb. Scrawled words and chalked pictures defaced the brownstone tenement fronts. An occasional man or woman, sitting on worn front steps, gazed at them silently as they passed.

Jim stopped before one of the houses. "Three-nineteen," he said. "This ought to be it."

On legs that felt numb, Ann walked with him up the steps. In the dirty little foyer Jim pushed the bell marked "Superintendent."

A slatternly woman with frizzy brown hair opened the door. "Well?" she demanded.

LOOKING past her into the ill-lighted hall, Ann felt dizzy and cold. This was the house of her nightmare. The same poisonous green walls, the same narrow stairs leading upward.

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Jim said, "Is your third-floor rear apartment vacant?"

"No, it ain't!" she said, and started to close the door.

He blocked the door with his foot. "Who lives there?"

"None of your business. And get your foot out of my door."

"Are they home now?"

"I ain't talking! Now beat it."

Obviously she wasn't talking. This was no Mr. Christopolous, alert for the proffered bill. This woman, evidently, had found that silence in the long run was more profitable than speech.

Taking out his wallet, Jim extracted a card, held it out to her for a second, and then replaced it. He said, "We want to inspect that apartment."

The woman's face blanched. "I don't want no trouble," she babbled, opening the door wide. "I just rent apartments. A man comes along, says he won't be using the place often, and offers me a little money on the side. I don't know what goes on. If people who look like they belong on Park Avenue want to come to parties in a dump like this, is it my business?"

He said grimly, "Do you have a pass key?"

"Sure, sure!" She fumbled in the pocket of her dirty apron. Bringing out a bunch of Yale keys, she detached one and handed it to him. "It's apartment 3-D. And whatever the trouble is, just remember I didn't know nothing about it."

Jim took Ann's arm. They climbed the stairs to the second floor. As they walked along the narrow corridor, between the green walls of her nightmare, it seemed to her that again they leaned smotheringly close. When she spoke it was less out of curiosity than out of the need to reassure herself that this time she was not dreaming or drugged, and that it was Jim who walked beside her, not the faceless man with the turned down hat brim. She asked, "What frightened that woman?"

"My police pass. I was pretty sure she wouldn't recognize it as the kind every reporter carries. She just saw the word 'Police,' and my picture, and jumped to the conclusion that I was a cop."

They had reached the third floor now. He fitted the key in the lock of 3-D, swung the door back. His fingers, groping along the wall just inside the door, found the light switch. A naked overhead bulb glared down on a room she dimly remembered. An upright piano. Two floor lamps. Chairs and a divan and scattered tables. Without a radio or books or magazines, it looked strangely impersonal. Not a living room, but just a room in which to give parties.

Her heart a sick, frantic drum within her, she walked with him across the living room, down a narrow hall. To the left a door yawned blackly. She whispered, "Here."

HE REACHED inside the door, flipped on that light. Instantly her gaze shot to the closet door at the foot of the narrow, khaki-blanketed cot.

Jim said quietly, "Give me that key."

Fingers numb, she opened her handbag and held out the key. "Stay here," he said. Walking across the room, he fitted the key in the lock. She heard a click, and the door swung back.

For a moment he stood there, tall form hiding the closet's interior. Then he said, "Don't be afraid. Come on over."

On shaking legs she crossed the room and stood beside him. There was nothing in the closet, not even a coat hanger. Then Jim jerked the light string dangling from the closet ceiling. They looked down at the gray, shining paint of the closet floor.

Jim said, "The floor's as clean as a whistle. People don't scrub a closet floor and leave the others dirty unless they've got a good reason—like bloodstains."

Abruptly he got down on one knee. "Have you got a bobbie pin?"

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Taking a bobbie pin from her hair, she held it out to him. With the pin in his right hand he deftly removed something from between the baseboard and the wall, and let it fall into his left hand. He got to his feet. She looked down at the two silver-green sequins glittering on the palm of his hand.

He said, "Your mermaid was in that closet, all right."

Her lips felt numb. "Where . . . ?"

"Where did they take her? The East River, I'm almost sure. Remember that second phone call I made at your house this afternoon? I was calling the morgue. They pulled an unidentified woman out of the river late yesterday. They think she'd been in the water about a week. Their autopsy wasn't finished this afternoon. When we leave here I'll call them for a full report."

He turned off the closet light and closed the door. Ann said thinly, "But how did you find this place?"

He stepped to the window and drew back the flimsy curtain. "Remember telling me that you saw 'a wall of fire' outside this room that night? Well, at Cavanaugh's a few minutes ago it suddenly hit me that to a drugged person a solid expanse of color like that, with light shining through it, might seem to shimmer and throb, like a sheet of flame."

She looked at the huge rectangle of scarlet light suspended in the darkness outside. But now it was no longer a pulsating wall of fire, but only the floor-to-ceiling silk curtains of Clyde's den a hundred feet away, with the lights blazing brightly behind them.

She said dazedly, "When I was at Clyde's yesterday I was within a few feet of this place, and yet I never dreamed . . ."

Taking her arm, Jim led her from the flat and down the narrow stairs. There was no sign of the slatternly woman in the hallway. Outside the house they turned toward the street where they had left the car. When they reached the drugstore on the corner he said, "I'm going to call the morgue and check on that autopsy."

SHE WAITED in the drugstore until he emerged. "I guess she was the one, all right," he said, walking with Ann toward the car. "Not that they can tell much when they've been in the water that long. She was a blonde, probably between twenty-five and thirty. She was wearing just a dress, and there were no labels or dry cleaning tags in it. But there were traces of green polish around the cuticle of her fingernails."

Ann remembered the mermaid's green talons reaching out, grasping her arms.

Jim said, as they got in the car, "When we get back to Cavanaugh's don't let that houseman see you're upset."

Horace was longer in answering their ring this time. When he opened the door he was not in his white jacket but in street clothes, with a soft felt hat in his hand.

He said, "Oh, Miss Marleigh. Mr. Cavanaugh hasn't returned, and I'm just leaving. This is my night off, you know."

She said, trying to keep her voice steady and natural, "May we wait for him?" Then, as the houseman hesitated: "You know Mr. Cavanaugh wouldn't mind. Not in my case."

Something flickered in Horace's eyes. "Yes, I know he's always glad to see you, Miss Marleigh."

He opened the door wide and they stepped past him into the hall. "Good-night," he said politely, and closed the front door behind him.

Jim asked, moving toward the stairs, "Where's Cavanaugh's bedroom?"

"Just off his den."

On the third floor they walked through the room with the scarlet curtains and entered the bedroom. Here the furnishings were luxurious but far more restrained. Shaded lamps on each side of the low, modern bed shone on the white pine bureau

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and the handblocked curtains, on the big wardrobe with its sliding doors. Jim went straight to the wardrobe and slid the doors back.

Standing up in one corner at the end of the row of neatly hanging suits, was a huge white box with the words "Inter-Borough Costumers" printed on the lid. As Jim dragged it from the wardrobe the lid fell off and a mass of dark fur tumbled out onto the beige carpet, the glass eyes of the bear's head fixed in their insane glare, the tusks of the open mouth glistening in the lamplight.

Ann's self-control broke completely. She gave a thin little wail, the back of her hand pressed to her teeth. And then Jim's left arm was holding her close and his right hand was drawing her hand away from her mouth. "Baby, baby! Don't!"

She said brokenly, "I never stopped loving you, not for a minute. And yet I distrusted you. I thought maybe it was you who—and it was Clyde. Can you ever forgive me?"

"Honey! What do you mean, forgive you? I love you."

He tilted her chin and his mouth came down on hers, warm, tender, infinitely reassuring. Her hands locked tightly around his neck. For a moment there was no terror, no bewilderment, nothing but the blessed certainty of their love.

A slight sound came from the doorway. Breaking free, Ann whirled around. Clyde stood in the bedroom doorway, an odd, old-fashioned looking gun in his hand.

A LUDICROUS expression of surprise and relief crossed his face. He lowered the gun, pressed a plump hand to his heart, and said, "Ann! You gave me a dreadful turn. I thought you were burglars!"

He laid the gun on the bureau. Ann recognized it as an Eighteenth Century dueling pistol, probably completely useless, from his collection in the third floor hall. "Whatever are you doing?" he asked, his gaze dropping to the mass of dark fur on the carpet. "Are you on a treasure hunt?"

Ann said, in a strained, high voice, "Clyde, what is that on the floor?"

"Well, it won't bite you, sweetie, if that's what you're afraid of. It's a costume. I wore it to a masquerade costume last week. I was an enormous success."

She stared at him, feeling a bewildering sense of unreality. There was no guilt or alarm in his face. It looked, as always, plump, complacent, and completely candid.

He was looking at Jim. "Don't I know you?"

"I'm Hastings, of the *Chronicle*."

"Oh, yes. One of the reporters who came to my party to see that Hindu do his rope trick. And then the wretch didn't even show up. I couldn't have been more humiliated. But come into the den, you two, and tell me how it is that I find you smooching in my boudoir. And please make the explanation amusing. I've had a dull day."

Puzzled and uncertain, Ann went with the two men into the den. Fussily Clyde seated her and Jim in low chairs beside one of the Chinese tables.

"Now stay right there while I pour out some of that perfectly sensational North African wine." He walked to the liquor cabinet, opened the doors. Back turned, he chattered on. "I was going to give you a taste of it the other day, Ann, remember? And then that phone call came, and I had to shoo you out."

Carrying a silver tray, he came back across the room and set three fragile-stemmed glasses on the lacquered table. Pulling a hassock close to the table, he sat down. "There!" he said. "It begins to look like a party." He opened a pearl-inlaid cigarette box. "Cigarette, anyone?"

Ann took one of the cork-tipped cigarettes, leaned toward the gold lighter Clyde held out to her. "Thank you," she said automatically. Then, as she leaned back in her chair, the cigarette slipped from her

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unsteady fingers to the oriental carpeting.

"MY RUG!" Clyde shrieked. Instantly he was off the hassock and down on his knees. Ann too bent over, picking up the cigarette, brushing at the carpet with her fingers.

"I'm sorry, Clyde. But see, it isn't burned, really it isn't?"

"No," he said, getting to his feet, "I guess there's no damage. But do try to be more careful, darling."

Ann's sense of bewilderment increased. Clyde was the same as always—talkative, hospitable, but old-maidishly concerned about his possessions. There was some mistake. He couldn't be the one who had dragged a dead or dying woman across the floor and locked her in a closet.

Seated on the hassock once more, Clyde sipped his drink and then waited, eyes bright with anticipation, for their reaction. "It tastes very good," Ann said.

"Strong," Jim commented. "More like a liqueur than a wine."

"Exactly!" Clyde beamed. "And it cost me only fourteen dollars a case. But now, my dears, tell Uncle Clyde how you happened to be rummaging through his wardrobe."

"First," Jim said evenly, "we have some questions for you, Mr. Cavanaugh. How is it that your masquerade party was held in a tenement flat?"

"Well, we all thought it an amusing idea. Sybaritic revels among the proletariat, and all." He broke off abruptly. "How did you know where the party was? It's supposed to be a secret."

Jim said, "Guessed it when Ann and I were here earlier this evening." He got to his feet and walked over to the scarlet curtains. "You oughtn't to leave your lights on, Mr. Cavanaugh. These windows are in a direct line with those of the flat opposite." He jerked a tasseled cord, and the curtains parted slightly. "Yes, in a direct line."

He stood there for a moment, back turned, looking out into the darkness. Then raising his wine glass, he tilted his red head. He made a choking sound. "Good lord! That stuff is strong."

"You're supposed to sip it," Clyde said, with some asperity, "not gulp it down as if it were beer. But how was it, Mr. Hastings, that you and Ann were here earlier this evening?"

Jim turned and came back to the table. "We came to see you about a certain perfume bottle. We learned that it had once held perfume blended for a friend of yours, a Mrs. Irene Vilnos."

Clyde smiled. "Ah, yes. Dear Irene and that suffocating perfume of hers. She brought me a vial of it to put in a steam brazier one night when I was giving an Ancient Egypt party. But why all this interest in perfumes?"

"We'll get to that. But first, what did you mean when you said 'we' thought it would be an amusing idea to hold parties in a coldwater flat? Who is 'we'?"

Clyde glanced at his guests' almost empty wine glasses, but made no move to refill them. "Well, the cult members, mainly. Perhaps you've heard about our cult? It's ideals are high, really, very high. But sometimes some of the members get the wrong ideas, and act upon them. In such cases it's very easy to get proof of their—regrettable activities. And that, of course, helps me in my business."

JIM ASKED, "Just what is your business, Mr. Cavanaugh?"

Clyde sipped his drink before replying. "Shakespeare, quite accurately, once referred to this as a 'naughty world,' Mr. Hastings. In one way or another, I learn of people's naughtiness. Now I don't like to be a gossip, and so I'm always able to be persuaded to keep quiet."

Ann stared at him unbelievingly. Jim said, "In other words, you're a blackmailer."

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Clyde shrugged. "I have expensive tastes, Mr. Hastings, and the money I inherited ran out long ago. Besides, people *will* confide in me." He turned to Ann. "Your brother, for instance. Did you know that Gordon ran down some yokel in a Connecticut village four years ago? It would have been manslaughter if they'd caught him. Gordon, though, got away with it. Fastened the blame on the girl he was with. Not that it mattered to her, because she was dead. But after Gordon had been so very clever, he had to succumb to remorse and alcohol. One day he came to me, very much in his cups, and babbled out the whole story."

Ann said, feeling sick, "So that's where all of the money from Aunt Julia's bonds went. He's been paying you blackmail."

She turned, face white, to Jim. Silently her eyes said, Try to forgive Gordon for what he did to your sister. And try to forgive me for doubting you when you told me about it.

Jim said, almost as if she had spoken aloud, "It's all in the past, Ann. And Gordon's had to pay for it."

Yes, she agreed silently, thinking of what her brother's life had been these past four years, Gordon had paid for it.

Turning to Clyde, she asked in that same sick voice, "And you were the one who played that monstrous trick on me, weren't you? How did you do it? How did you have me brought to that party?"

Clyde smiled. "Your Mr. Hastings seems so clever. Maybe he's figured that out, too."

"I think I have," Jim said evenly. "The afternoon of the masquerade party, you had her look at the flashing light behind that miniature idol over there until, as she phrased it, she almost went to sleep. I think she *did* go to sleep. You hypnotized her, and by post-hypnotic suggestion you induced her to take some sort of drugs at a certain hour that night, drugs in capsule form you'd placed in the perfume vial."

CLYDE said appreciatively, "You *are* good, Mr. Hastings. I salute your perception."

Ann said, her voice low, "Then I suppose it wasn't an accident that I was called to that awful Times Square Hotel that night."

"Of course not, darling. I knew Gordon was there, fighting one of his three-day bouts with guilt and alcohol. And poor Larry Gretson, of course, was managing the place. I suppose that's why Gordon hid out there so often. Since Larry was another—er—client of mine, they had something in common. Do you want to know how Larry became my client? Well, I found out that while he was at Yale . . ."

"I don't want to hear about it!" Ann cried. "I just want to know how you got me to that hotel."

"Why, I just phoned Larry—it was his night off—and told him to call the desk clerk and give him orders to call you, on the grounds that Gordon was getting out of hand. Once you were there, everything worked beautifully. You took the drug right on schedule, evidently, and then forgot about it completely, just as I'd told you under hypnosis that you would do. Then Horace knocked at your door and brought you to the party."

"Horace!" So it had been Clyde's houseman who, hat pulled low over his face, had driven her through the dreamlike streets to the terrors of the masquerade party.

"Yes, Horace. He's not only a servant, but a friend and confidant as well. In fact, he's the one who rented our party flat from that untidy harridan on the next street."

"But why? Why did you want me brought there?"

"Several reasons. First, I wanted to test my ability at post-hypnotic suggestion. It's only recently that I've been experimenting with that sort of thing. Too, I thought it

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a good way of managing the problem of how to get you to take cocaine for the first time. And also, it amused me to have the upright Ann Marleigh to a party she would have walked out on immediately if she had been in her normal state."

He was smiling, but his eyes were cold. She thought, He hates me; he's always hated me, because I'm not corrupt like him, or sick and wretched like Gordon.

Clyde continued, "Everything went beautifully until my dear, dear ex-wife showed up. She took it into her head to divulge all my clever little plans to you. I lost my head, I suppose, or maybe it's just that she's irritated me so dreadfully all these years. Anyway, I picked those scissors up off the dresser and stabbed her. Almost immediately, of course, I was in complete control of myself again, and so I put the scissors into your hand."

Jim said, his voice hard, "On the theory that if she did remember any of it the next day, and if she couldn't bring herself to dismiss it as a dream, she'd be afraid that *she* was the one who'd committed murder. You figured that that would be enough to keep her quiet."

EXACTLY," Clyde said.

Through her sick horror Ann felt a certain relief. At least she knew for sure now that she hadn't stabbed Geraldine . . .

"Geraldine!" she said aloud. "Did you say it was Geraldine? But it couldn't have been. She telephoned you just yesterday while I was here."

"No, dear," Clyde contradicted smilingly, "I merely said it was Geraldine. As a matter of fact it was Larry Gretson, all in a swivet. About you. He was terribly smitten with you, poor lad, from the night of the masquerade party onward. For instance, after I'd put Geraldine in the closet that night, his first thought was to get you out of that tenement house. He took you down to the car, then came back for his overcoat to put over his costume, and then drove you to the back entrance of the hotel and told you to go up to your room and go to bed. But Larry told me you didn't remember that part of it."

"No," Ann said, "I didn't remember that part of it."

"We couldn't leave poor Geraldine there in the closet, of course," Clyde went on chattily, "so after Larry took you away, I shooed the guests out of the flat. They were so addled that probably they wouldn't have noticed even if Horace and I had carried Geraldine right through the living room, but I thought it best to take no chances. After they'd gone, Horace and I carried Geraldine down the fire escape and through the back entrance to this house. I substituted for that absurd mermaid costume one of the dresses from a trunk she'd left here when she decided to divorce me. Then Horace and I drove her down to the East River. And so, I've cleared up your little mystery," he finished brightly.

"Not quite," Jim said evenly. "There's Larry Gretson. You killed him, didn't you?"

Clyde shrugged. "I had to. As I told you, the poor boy had fallen hard for Ann. In fact, to keep him from doing something utterly mad, such as reporting me to the police, I'd had to promise him to call off my little plan to keep introducing her to the delights of cocaine until she would want to make the acquaintance permanent.

"Then he learned that Ann was seeing a lot of you, Mr. Hastings. He was afraid that you were investigating that 'nightmare' of hers. The infatuated boy wanted to spare Ann the shock of finding out that she'd been present at a murder. He called yesterday afternoon and insisted on coming here to talk to me about it. Unfortunately, just as he turned the corner into this street, he saw you, Ann, leaving the house. He suspected me of not keeping my promise, of intending to put something into your wine—the same wine which both of you have found so enjoyable this evening.

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Larry became extremely upset, threatened to tell you the truth no matter what the consequences to himself, and so on. Naturally I had to follow him last night. I had a gun, but luckily when I found him alone on that park bench he was in a dazed condition, evidently from some kind of fall, and so I was able to use a knife, a far quieter weapon."

ANN stared at him in numb disbelief. How was it that she had never glimpsed the evil in Clyde Cavanaugh until tonight? Suddenly she had the answer. Clyde had always taken pains to make himself ridiculous. It is hard to suspect the presence of evil in a man everyone laughs at.

She said, her voice low, "But why? Why did you want to make me into an addict? Just because you've always disliked me?"

"Of course not," he said scornfully. "I had a very practical objective. I want that Shakespeare folio."

She said incredulously, "You mean the one that was supposed to be hidden somewhere in my house? Clyde, you're insane! It isn't there. My aunt had the entire house gone over by experts. The whole thing is just one of those legends that grow up about old families and old houses."

"I disagree," Clyde said stiffly. "I've made some investigations of my own, and I know that a Marleigh bought the folio secretly in Europe over a hundred years ago and brought it home with him, and I believe it's hidden in that house. If your aunt had left the house to your brother rather than you, I'd have had possession a long time ago. But you persist in keeping that sentimental promise to your aunt about not selling it. If my plans had worked out, however, you'd have sold me the house. You'd have done anything I asked, just as Gordon does."

"But Clyde! Even if the folio were there—and it isn't—you'd never have been able to offer it for sale publicly, not without a lot of difficult questions being asked."

"I wouldn't have sold it publicly. I had a buyer lined up, a multi-millionaire who would pay a staggering price for it and keep it for his own personal enjoyment."

Ann said steadily, "I don't know why you've told us all this, but you realize, don't you, that we're going straight to the police?"

Clyde smiled, "Ann, Ann! You underestimate me. Do you think I'd have told you my little secrets if there were any chance of your repeating them? The cord of the telephone in this room is cut. The door leading into the hall is locked, and the key is hidden. Of course your Mr. Hastings is a husky fellow, and in time would be able to batter down the door. But long before that you will both have fallen flat on your faces. A little something I put in your wine. Not poison. It would be awkward to have you die here. Just something which induces unconsciousness for several hours." He glanced at his watch. "Yes, you should be feeling the effects about now. It never takes more than twenty minutes at the most to work."

She felt it then, the icy cold creeping upward from her hands and feet, the sick pounding of her heart, the constriction of her throat.

"Horace will be back soon," Clyde was saying. "It shouldn't be difficult for us to get two apparently drunken people into your car, Mr. Hastings. Horace will drive your car, and I will follow. Upstate I know of a wooden bridge which crosses a narrow but deep stream. Your car will plunge through the railing, and eventually you will be found in it, beneath fifteen feet of water. Autopsies in that particular county are not as thorough as those in New York City. The chances are overwhelming that the presence of the drug will never be discovered, and that the verdict will be accidental drowning. A very sad thing, a couple so young, so attractive, and with . . ."

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HER HEARTBEATS were a steady thunder in her ears now, and she seemed to see Clyde's plump face and the tapestry on the wall behind him through a thickening mist.

And then, rising above the sound of her heartbeats, she heard Jim's voice. "You're the one who's done the underestimating, Cavanaugh. Just as you're the one who's going to fall flat on his face. Over-confidence is your trouble. You're too used to easy victims—alcoholics and near-psychotics and what not. Do you think I'd have drunk anything you served us, or let Ann drink it? When she dropped her cigarette I had the chance to switch her drink with yours, but if she hadn't given me the opportunity, I'd have found some other way to do it. As for my drink, if you'll look closely, you'll find a wine stain on those scarlet curtains of yours. While I was facing the curtains you saw me tilt my head back and raise the glass, and then you heard me cough. But that didn't mean I'd drained my glass, Cavanaugh. You just thought it did."

Clyde's pallor had a greenish tinge. The fingers of his right hand flew to his pulse, rested there. Then, grasping the table's edge, he drew himself up from the hassock and moved uncertainly across the room. Jim rose and followed, keeping a step or two behind the plump, unsteady figure.

As Clyde fumbled in the pocket of his checked vest, sweat was visible on his face. He brought out a tiny key. Stooping over a rosewood table, he turned the key in the lock of a drawer. He pulled the drawer out, pawed frantically inside it. Then, left hand pulling the drawer down with him, he crumpled to the thick carpet.

Jim stepped over the plump figure, lying there in the litter from the overturned drawer, and picked up a door key from the carpet. He fit the key into the lock, turned it, and opened the door into the hall.

Less than ten minutes later Jim and Ann stood in the cool darkness outside Clyde Cavanaugh's house. Clyde still lay behind the locked door of the den upstairs. A call had been made from the downstairs telephone, and at any moment green and white police cars would be turning the corner.

Drawing the fresh, crisp air deep into her lungs, Ann looked at the lighted windows of a tall apartment house on the East River Drive, and at the frosty glitter of Autumn stars above.

She turned her face up to Jim's. "We're going to be so rich," she said, and she knew that he would understand she didn't mean money. "We're going to be so happy. And I love you so very much."

He didn't answer with words. He held her close in his arms, his lips warm on her soft, responding ones. For a timeless interval even the memory of terror and confusion were gone, and they were just two more lovers, locked in each others arms on a tree-shadowed street.

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Speak for Yourself, John

By
IBBIE ELLIGET

. . . but when John did speak, it was to the wrong girl!

ON THE MORNING after Lane Enterprises moved to their new offices, the secretary to the president did not sit admiring the unaccustomed splendor. Neither did she attack her work with her usual vigor.

What Rosie Malloy did do was indulge in a flight of fancy. Pointed chin tucked in her palm, she sat there at her desk and dreamed herself all the way to Bermuda. On a honeymoon, no less. She was lying on the beach with John beside her and a big, round tropical moon caressing them, when her practical side stepped in.

It reminded her scornfully, that John Lane had never so much as looked at her with a gleam in his eye. But her willful heart had an answer all ready and waiting. Until now, John hadn't had time for romance. He had been too busy making money. Besides, look at the way he depended on her. He never tackled a problem without first discussing it with her. Hadn't she helped fight all of his battles and celebrate all of his triumphs?

At this point her brand new buzzer purred gently. The polite summons made her smile. All along, she had been certain he'd go right on bellowing, "Rosie," at the top of his lungs. She pushed back her chair and stood up—a small, neatly made girl with short red hair and gray-green eyes that held both humor and intelligence.

Snatching up notebooks and pencils, she crossed over and pushed open the heavy pickled pine door of his office. But right there, she stopped and began to laugh.

NEW OFFICES or not, John was so completely John.

Coatless, shoes off, feet propped up on a mahogany desk that was almost as big as some of the offices they had worked in, he was leaning back comfortably in his chair. His bright red tie had worked around to a spot just below his left ear, and his dark hair looked as though it had fought a losing battle with a garden rake.

His heavy brows shot up. "Now, what the hell's the matter?" he demanded.

"Nothing," she said when she could catch her breath. "Not a thing. I was just thinking that if one of your new vice-presidents walked in here right now, he'd probably have apoplexy."

To her utter amazement, he jerked his feet off the desk and sheepishly began fumbling for his shoes. She waded across a mile or so of carpet and settled herself in the deep leather chair across from him.

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"Good lord, don't tell me you've let those two stuffed shirts awe you," she said.

There was, of course, nothing wrong with the vice-presidents Lane Enterprises had acquired with its merger with Consolidated Oil. They were efficient, capable men. But from the first they had been politely raised eye-browish about their new boss and his far from orthodox conduct.

He straightened up and yanked his tie back to position beneath his rigid chin. His hard, hungry mouth curled. "Now, Rosie, don't be an idiot. The VP's can concentrate on something useful—like proration or getting that new pipeline laid."

"Then why the sudden decor? It certainly can't be for me—not after all the times I've seen you in oil-soaked dungarees."

He grinned. "That, my girl, is what I got you in here for." His deep blue eyes darkened the way they always did when his mind was fingering a new project.

She leaned forward eagerly. "What?"

"Well, now that I'm rolling in dough, I'm going to stop being a roughneck. When a man gets thirty, it's time he settled down."

ROSIE'S heart began to bounce. Could he possibly mean . . .

"I'm going to build a home and get married," he went on. "And that's where you come in."

"Why, John," she breathed, but he didn't seem to notice.

"Of course you'll have to help me. I mean I never have had time for this social malarkey, and there's no telling what kind of a boner I might pull."

She opened her mouth to tell him that so far as she was concerned he could commit faux pas's all over the place just so long as they got to the altar. But he stopped her cold.

"You see, Rosie, this girl is a lady."

"What girl?" the words leapt out.

"The one I'm going to marry, Shelley Porter. She lives in Pineville—you know, my home town."

She caught the edge of the desk and held on while she fought her way back to sanity. "But I didn't know you were engaged," she managed finally. While I, fool that I am, was daydreaming about Bermuda.

"Oh, I'm not," he admitted. "I haven't seen her for five years. But I've been in love with her ever since I can remember, and with you to help me . . ." he broke off with an it's-in-the-bag gesture.

Rosie longed to wrap that mahogany desk around his sunburned neck or bat her own brains out. She couldn't decide which, but she said quietly, "Look, John, will you just give it to me straight, the way you'd tell me about an oil lease."

AND THEN she sat and thought unmentionable words for fifteen minutes while he talked about the little girl with golden curls and big blue eyes who lived in a huge, sprawling white-pillared mansion. Of course Shelley hadn't then or later paid much attention to the boy in patched pants who lived across the tracks in a shabby, unpainted house. Oh, she had let him buy her an ice-cream soda once, carry her books a few times. And just before he left home after his mother died, she had gone to a dance with him. Right then, he swore that when his fortune was made he'd go back and marry her. "I knew there'd never be anybody else for me," he wound up. "Her hands are so little and white, and she's so-so-such a perfect lady."

Rosie held back a snort. She might have known that John Lane whose hair-raising experiences on his road to fortune nobody knew better than she, would assume just such a corny attitude. "Just how do you expect to go about winning this paragon?" she asked carefully.

"Now, Rosie, don't be like that just because you never fell in love."

She ground her teeth. "After all, there is a little matter of her consent."

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The Fall Festival, he explained, would begin in Pineville in a couple of days. There would be a week of parties, dances, concerts and that sort of thing. They'd fly down and take it in. To justify Rosie's presence, he'd announce that he was negotiating for oil property there. "You can watch and be sure I don't make any mistakes."

He was taking it completely for granted that she would go, that she would help him win a wife, just as she had helped him make a fortune. And the devil of it is, she thought, I'll do it too. I haven't got any more sense.

She sat there nodding while he gave her instructions about invitations and reservations. And she went right on nodding when he said, "And plan a campaign for me to use on Shelley." She was a fool. She was a woman in love.

IT WAS the first night of the Festival. Rosie and John were at the Country Club dance as guests of the Plimsalls. Mrs. Plimsall, a dumpy little woman who wore a pince nez on a black velvet ribbon, was all a-twitter.

"I can't tell you how delighted we are to be entertaining Pineville's celebrity," she said with an arch glance at John. "And you too, my dear," she gave Rosie's hand a pat. "John tells me he never would have been able to do it without your help."

Her husband nodded his bald head. "I always said you'd make a million, John—even when you were delivering groceries for me."

John smiled and mumbled a reply, but Rosie could see his heart wasn't in it. He kept watching the door. People crowded around the table to welcome him and be introduced to Rosie. There was a lot of gay talk. But at last, they all went away to dance after being assured that their guests preferred to sit out a couple until they had a chance to say hello to everybody.

Rosie thought that under any other circumstances, she would have loved all this. The little town was a delightful place with the tall, proud pines standing guard over everything, and was particularly appealing right now with banners and bunting lining Main Street. Their hotel, for all its outmoded bath tubs, seemed to wear an ageless grandeur.

Suddenly, she felt John stiffen. "There she is," he whispered.

And Rosie, turning to look, decided she would have wanted to scratch Shelley Porter's eyes out even if the other girl hadn't been half so beautiful. Shelley, in pale pink tulle, was a fugitive from Fairyland, and as fragile and delicate as the pink camellia she wore in her shining blonde hair. She swept into the room on the arm of a tall, handsome man who was almost as blonde as she.

Almost at once, John made a move to rise, but Rosie put a restraining hand on his arm. "Don't be silly," she said. "I told you romance is not like the oil business. If you try to rush her, you'll frighten her."

AND THAT, she told herself, is a bald-faced lie. I'll bet she wouldn't be afraid of a man-eating tiger as long as it was a male one. But that had nothing to do with the strategy she had planned so carefully.

John growled under his breath, but he settled back. "What do I do?" he demanded gruffly.

Cross and miserable, Rosie said, "Now, John, if you want me to help you, stop acting like a sore-tailed bear."

He grinned apologetically. "All right, Rosie, but damn it all, ain't . . ."

"Damn! Ain't!" she mocked. "Didn't I tell you no gentleman uses such language?"

"Oh, all right, all right. What do I do?"

"Just sit here and look melancholy," she told him, "And Shelley'll come to you. Don't think for a minute she doesn't know you're here, and no woman can resist a

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man who seems too preoccupied to notice her."

Especially, she thought, when the man looked as virile as John did in his tux. Poor John. She was giving him a bad time of it. It had been a wrench for him to give up his beloved red ties, and it was only after she explained that if he wanted to marry a lady, he might as well get used to those things that he had agreed to curb his swearing, improve his English, bow from the waist and refrain from slapping his knee when he laughed. She wanted to weep when she thought of his becoming a Don Juan de luxe, but he had said plan a campaign, and she had done her best.

He began to fidget again, and she asked merely to hold his attention, "Who's the beautiful hunk of man with her? Maybe I'll find romance down here too."

For a fraction of a second, she could have sworn he didn't like her showing interest in another man, but before she could derive any comfort from the thought, she knew she had imagined it. "That's Alan Dennent," he told her. "Old family. Used to be rich as Croesus, but . . ."

"Shhh," she whispered. "Here they come. Remember now, don't talk much, and use that melting look you practiced."

She could see him turning red at the memory of that half hour she had kept him before a mirror.

AND THEN Shelley was there with both hands outstretched in an appealing welcome. "John Lane! How perfectly delightful," she cried, music in every word.

John came up from the table like a puppet on a string. With a pang, Rosie saw that his look was better than anything he had managed before the mirror. But dazed as he was, he was following her instructions. He said low, "It's Shelley Porter, isn't it?"

Shelley nodded and added with a coy tone that she hoped he hadn't forgotten carrying her books.

After that there was a period of refined bedlam during which introductions were made, the Plimsalls returned from dancing and various other people appeared. By the time Rosie began to sort things out, John and Shelley had wandered away to the dance floor and Alan was asking her to dance. She smiled grimly and went into his arms.

Three hours later, getting into tailored navy pajamas, Rosie told herself with resignation that her plan was succeeding far better than she had expected. John, conducting himself with more restraint than she would have believed possible, had worn a do-or-die air that she knew meant he was determined to win Shelley, no matter what the cost. As for Shelley, she had spent the evening hammering on the walls of what she plainly thought was John's detachment, like a blacksmith forging a horseshoe. She had even insisted that he take her home, saying in her pretty way, "Alan, dear, you'll see Miss Malloy to her hotel, won't you?"

And "Alan dear," being obviously so in love with Shelley he could deny her nothing, had agreed. Rosie hadn't been able to resist asking him why he didn't stand up for his rights, but he only smiled in a resigned fashion and said, "Oh, this has been going on for years. She always comes back to me in the end."

Rosie hadn't bothered to tell him that this was going to be the exception that proved the rule. She must have been psychic. The strategy she had planned was tailor-made for just such a female as this Dresden doll.

ROSIE was awakened the next morning by pounding on her door and John shouting her name in a voice that she was sure would bring down the wrath of the management. She slid her arms into a robe and padded barefoot to put a stop to the commotion.

"Hi," he beamed down at her. "I came

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to tell you—I came to tell you—I . . ." His words trailed off and his blue eyes darkened. She realized with sudden intuition that he had forgotten what he started to say.

There was an odd, almost startled look on his face. He was, her heart shouted exultantly, aware of her at last. For an eon or two, they stood there—a man and a woman—his eyes telling her of one amazing new discovery after another, and hers saying to him, You idiot, I've known it all along.

And then the telephone rang.

John jumped and then, with a nervous laugh, backed away. The moment was shattered. Rosie wanted to fall on her face and kick and scream. She didn't, of course. She crossed and picked up the still ringing phone.

It was Shelley, damn her. Would Miss Malloy come to her dance tonight? Alan would pick her up. Miss Malloy, she gritted, would be delighted, thank you. She hung up and turned back to John.

As though the look had never happened, he said quickly, "I'm taking her horseback riding this morning, Rosie."

"Swell," she tried to put the proper amount of enthusiasm into it.

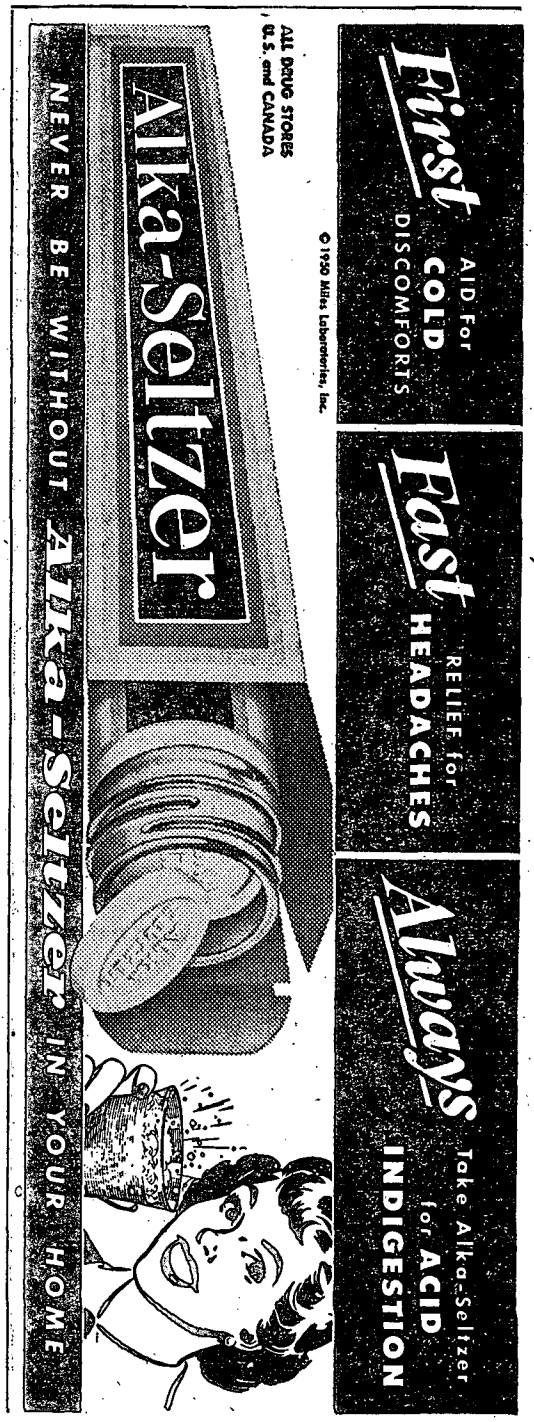
She must have succeeded because he went on eagerly, "Isn't she the most beautiful thing you ever saw?"

"You sound like a lovesick schoolboy," she told him.

But he only laughed. "I feel like one," he said. "Look, do I still have to keep up this strong, silent act? Can't I just break down and tell her?"

It was an instant before Rosie could make herself answer. She was certain that Shelley would find the real John Lane much too rugged for her tastes; that if he dropped the detached pose, she'd soon lose interest. And with Shelley out of the picture— Firmly, Rosie shoved temptation aside. John wanted Shelley. That look, earth rocking as it had been to her, was just a simple male reaction on his part.

She said, "You've got to keep up the strong, silent act, John, and don't forget it."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BUT AFTER he had gone, she kept brooding over that look. She knew she was a fool, but she was in love, and womanlike, she gleaned a little happiness from dwelling on what might have been. At least, she did for a time, and then somehow, out of her brooding, rebellion emerged.

Here she was, at twenty-five, smack up against a dead end. She had sacrificed four years of her life to John. She thought of the better jobs she had turned down, of the dates she had refused.

Well, nuts to John Lane! She wasn't silly enough to think she'd fall in love with someone else. No matter by what other word you called it, she was destined to be an old maid. But she'd be the most glamorous old maid that ever drew breath. Eyes blazing, she flew to the closet, snatched down the simple green crepe evening dress and set to work on it. That done, she went out and visited a cosmetic counter.

If her mirror hadn't already told her that her work hadn't been in vain, Alan's gasp would have. Her white shoulders were bare above the daringly low cut of the dress. A slit in the skirt revealed a provocative glimpse of her nylon-sheathed leg, and she had skillfully enhanced her beauty with eye shadow, lipstick and crystal eardrops.

When Alan could stop staring, he burst out, "Why, Miss Malloy, you're devastating!"

She gave him a dazzling smile. "You can call me Rosie."

When they entered the high ceilinged hallway of the Porter mansion, Rosie had to admit it was all John had said. Deep carpets, polished mahogany, graceful spiral stairway. She looked into the rooms beyond and thought what a perfect background the crystal chandeliers, the frail gilt chairs, the soft roses and greens made for Shelley's beauty.

With a suppressed giggle, she thought, I hope the pictures don't fall at sight of me.

John, looking uncomfortable but determined, stood beside Shelley welcoming the guests. His eyes bugged when he saw Rosie. But after greeting Shelley, breathtaking as ever in demure white taffeta, she swept past without giving him a chance to say a word. She had other fish to fry.

But for all that, she wasn't prepared for what happened. She had expected attention, of course, but not in such overwhelming numbers. Before she knew it, she was being whirled from one pair of arms to another. And when at last, she laughingly demanded to sit down and catch her breath, she was immediately surrounded.

"Can I get you a Tom Collins?" some one asked.

"Or a martini?" suggested another.

"Or champagne?"

"Champagne by all means," said Rosie. This was her night and she meant to make the most of it.

Seconds later, two glasses were being poked at her. She looked from one man to the other, and then took a glass in each hand. "I'll drink both of them," she told them graciously, and began sipping from first one glass and then the next, to the delight of her coterie. They thought she was wonderful, and said so. And by the time Rosie had finished both glasses of champagne, she agreed with them. There was a strange buzzing in her head, but she didn't mind. She felt beautiful and clever and singingly happy.

She said, "Did you fellows ever hear the story of the horse that ordered a martini with two olives?"

THEY all swore they hadn't and she told them. Somebody gave her another glass of champagne. Between witty remarks that kept all her admirers laughing, she drank it.

And then suddenly, someone was shoving the group aside, and to her surprise, John stood over her. "Want to dance?" he asked.

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She laughed up at him. "And leave all these beautiful men," she said flippantly. "Don't be silly."

John's eyes darkened. "I want to talk to you," he insisted.

Rosie shrugged. "The Lonely Hearts Department's closed for the night."

FOR AN instant, he just stood there glaring at her. And then, at the top of his lungs, he bellowed, "Rosie Malloy, you get up out of that chair!"

A stunned silence fell over the group, and some of the men began to back away. From somewhere, Shelley appeared. She put a hand on John's arm. "Now John, if Miss Malloy doesn't want to dance . . ."

He shook her off. "You keep out of this," he growled.

Shelley fell back, gasping. "Well, I never in all my life."

She might as well have saved her breath. John was looking at Rosie. "Make a pantywaist out of me, will you?" he shouted. "Turn me into a pantywaist while you have yourself a hell of a good time. Well, you won't get away with it!"

"I did nothing of the sort!" Rosie flared.

"Well, it wasn't because you didn't try. Get up. You're going to dance with me."

"I won't," she said mutinously.

Without another word, he leaned over, picked her up in his arms, and heedless of her kicking, heedless of the muttered protests of the other guests, carried her out of the room, through the high ceilinged hallway and down the steps.

There he set her down, caught her shoulders and shook her. "Give an accounting of yourself."

Rosie was furious. "Why should I account to you?" she snapped.

He looked startled. "Why, because you're my secretary and—and . . ." He stopped in utter confusion.

Rosie's anger died, and the most wonderful, beautiful gorgeous glow took its place. "And what?" she persisted.

He gulped twice. "And I love you," he said, surprise written all over his sheepish face.

What happened after that made Rosie's daydreams seem like marbles. Some kisses later, she said, "Do you suppose we dare go back in there long enough to call a taxi?"

"I don't know," he said, "And anyway I should make you walk all the way to town."

"Why?"

"For letting me be such a dumb cluck all this time."

Rosie thought about that. "I guess you're right," she admitted.

Sure Sign

It's hard to admit it,
Even to me,
But love must be waning
To some degree;
For I have forgotten
To think of you
At least for an hour
This whole day through.
And though I still miss you
Above everything,
I'm well on the road
To recovering!

—Catherine E. Berry

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Sometimes a girl achieves her dream—to discover it isn't what she wants.

Kiss Love Good-By

By
VIOLA CORNETT

MAB TRACY finished dressing, and came down the long stairs of Mrs. Katie O'Hara's boarding house to show her landlady the gown she was wearing to her engagement-party.

Mrs. O'Hara was in the kitchen where she had just finished doing the dinner dishes. Usually Mab helped her with them, but tonight she couldn't, of course, not when she had to look her most elegant for Lane Dalton and for Lane's fastidious and dainty Aunt Phoebe.

Mrs. O'Hara turned from the dish-cupboard and raised her hands in admiration. "Sakes alive! You look like some little blonde fairy come over from Ireland itself. Except an Irish fairy would wear green, not blue."

Mab's eyes lit up like sunlit skies. She pirouetted in front of Mrs. O'Hara with the gay step of a girl whose dreams have come true. Her strapless powder-blue dress had a wide tulle skirt, glinting all over with sequins, and a shirred bodice that clung close to her delicate bosom and straight young back. She wore a cluster of small blue artificial flowers above her right ear, which made her blonde hair look even more softly fair than it really was. "Do you think I'll please the very particular Miss Phoebe Dalton?" she asked.

"You'd please St. Patrick himself," Mrs. O'Hara said firmly. "And don't be letting the Dalton name scare you, even if the Daltons do own half of Poppy City. You're just as good as they are."

Mab sank down into a kitchen chair, after first looking automatically to be sure she hadn't gotten splashed with anything during Mrs. O'Hara's dishwashing, which was of a vigorous, far-flung type. She suddenly looked subdued. She said, "That's all very well to say. But you know it isn't like that, really. Not in Poppy City. I'm the little stenographer who's stolen a march on all the eager debs and their mamas, and made off with the town catch. Miss Phoebe Dalton doesn't like it. None of the rest of Lane's exclusive set like it. I've gotten the slow-freeze act every time I've been around any of the local Four hundred—the patronizing smile and the amused stare. I'll get it again tonight."

Mrs. O'Hara looked indignant. "Can't

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"Go back to the party. I . . ."
Then suddenly, she was crying.

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this young man of yours do something to stop it? Him with his princely air? Sure, and he could make anybody do anything!"

Mab's landlady was half-afraid of smooth and poised and heart-shakingly handsome Lane, with his shining, brushed blond hair, like the helmet of an aristocratic knight of old, and his smilingly calm gray eyes. Lane, who had been born to the purple, and acted it.

Mab said; "I doubt if he even notices. Men don't pay much attention to the catty things women say and do. And he couldn't very well bawl them out, could he? After all, they're his friends from away back. And Lane would hate any sort of scene."

IT WAS JUST then that the front door-bell rang, and Mab ran to open it. Nearing the door, she slowed her pace. You couldn't let even a Prince out of a fairy-tale realize that his coming turned your day into glory. Even a real life Cinderella couldn't act like one, for fear of seeming gauche.

But her heart turned over, as always, when she saw Lane. He was so completely the answer to a young girl's dreams. It wasn't only that he had wealth and power and social position, the ancient attributes of all fairy-tale princes; he was handsome and fascinating, too.

Mab wondered, as she had wondered a million times since the night Lane had told her he was in love with her and wanted to marry her, what he saw in her, particularly. She was little and blonde and pretty, but lots of girls were that. And she was just Lane's secretary, who wore a trim blue suit to the offices of Dalton, Incorporated, and made squiggles in a notebook which she later translated into neat letters. She didn't have mink coats and emerald bracelets and a clipped finishing-school accent to add to any native charms she possessed. She did her own hair, and her own nails, and sometimes even made her own clothes. As far as the glamour of wealth and an aristocratic background went, she was strictly minus.

Lane took her hands. He said, spreading them wide and looking at her admiringly, "You look like a hunk of sky, decorated with a splash of sunlight. Hello, beautiful."

"Hello," she said huskily. It was such a commonplace word to say to a man she worshiped the way she worshiped Lane. If only poetry were still in fashion, and you could talk like the people in Shakespeare's plays.

But probably Lane would laugh amusedly at anything like that. Lane was a pretty practical guy. Although he knew romantic words, they were modern-romantic words, laced with laughter and slang.

When Lane freed her hands, she took her blue velvet cloak from the closet, and, wordlessly, let him put it about her shoulders. All the stars in the sky made music when his warm fingers touched her smooth, white skin.

In his car she was swept by a sudden wild desire to escape. If only they could keep on driving to some place where they could dance, be by themselves, instead of going to the big Dalton home, where local society could inspect Lane Dalton's little secretary-fiancée officially for the first time. For a moment, Mab almost hated the exquisite diamond that seemed to burn on her finger just now. She'd rather have a smaller ring, and have Lane be somebody just ordinary with an aunt and friends who wouldn't snub her in a well-bred, but still-felt manner.

But life wasn't like that. You had to face things. And she was sure the people around Lane would get used to her, in time, if she kept herself poised and pleasant and apparently unaware of their subtly veiled snubs.

It was going to be hard, very hard. But, after all, Cinderella had gone through worse, what with nasty step-sisters and an ashy chimney-corner. Mab murmured aloud, "Ashes are so messy."

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"WHAT?" Lane said. He spared her a quick gray glance from his efficient watch of the street ahead.

"Just talking to myself. Don't you ever talk to yourself?"

"Only when I use words better not said in polite company. Don't tell me you go in for private cursing, Mab." He chuckled.

She couldn't help laughing, too. "No. But I've heard some of the remarks you've made when you thought nobody was around."

He gave her another side-glance, rueful this time. "I guess a man never does have any secrets from his secretary."

"Do you want some?" Now she was beginning to forget her unhappy mood. Being with Lane always lifted her spirits. They clicked; they had fun together.

"Well, after we're married, if I should just briefly happen to think that some other gal has pretty ankles, I'd rather you didn't know about it. A husband can get in trouble that way."

Something stabbed her—a nostalgia for the sort of marriage she'd never have with Lane. A casual, laughing marriage, with gay friends about them. A marriage in which she could relax and be herself, without the constant knowledge that Lane's aunt and his friends were thinking he had married beneath him.

Then they drew up in front of the Dalton home. It was a big Southern-colonial place, white as a frosted cake, with thick pillars lending it great dignity. A green lawn stretched from the curved driveway to the sidewalk. Mab remembered how she had walked past this place as a child and caught her breath at the idea people could really live in a place as magnificent as the County Court House. But now she was going to live in his house herself.

She'd been here a couple of times before. Lane had brought her home to dinner. But the house still terrified her. She couldn't think of it as a prospective home for a girl named Mab Tracy, even if she did change her name to Mab Dalton. Mab thought fantastically. The house will always snub me. It will always know I don't really belong in it.

In the big reception-hall, things were worse, because she was facing the massed phalanx of the Poppy City Four Hundred. She'd met them more or less singly before when Lane had taken her to the bar at the Country Club for a drink, or to the homes of one or another of his friends. But now it seemed to Mab that a palpable atmosphere of hostility greeted her. Cool, amused eyes told her she wasn't welcome. She was the outsider who had stolen the prince of the clan away from some rightful mate, and the clan was out to rub in the fact that she was an outsider.

Mouth dry, smile and voice nervously quick, she managed to acknowledge introductions and greet those she'd met before. She wondered if Lane noticed the delicately icy manner of his friends toward her. But no, as she'd told Mrs. O'Hara, men didn't notice things like that.

It was just as the music started in the big ballroom that the knocker on the front door clanged again. A maid went to open it, and then stood rigid, staring. "Mr. Pierce!" she said in a half-welcoming, half-dismayed tone.

A VOICE that Mab would have thought was Lane's voice if Lane hadn't been right there beside her, said laughingly, "Yes, it's the bad penny. May I come in?"

Lane said, "It's my cousin." He moved toward the door.

The maid stood aside as the man outside entered. At the same moment, Lane reached the door. Mab gasped as the two men shook hands. For the tall, black-haired and black-eyed fellow in the rough outdoor clothing might have been a brunette edition of Lane. They were absolute twins, except for coloring.

Lane said, "What in blazes are you doing in Poppy City? Last I heard, you were

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running a photographer's studio in Chicago."

The dark man laughed. "Oh, I got bored with staying in one place, so I sold the studio, bought a trailer for my car, and took to the road. I'm doing free-lance photography for various magazines as I drive along. Fun, too."

Mab thought, I'll bet he uses the word "fun" a lot. I'll bet he *is* fun. What an easy, casual way he has about him. And something inside her heart seemed to expand, like a flower in the sun.

Lane chuckled. "Just like you, you born gypsy. Wish I could do the same. But I'm all weighed down with responsibilities." However, Lane's voice was cheerful, and Mab knew his weight of responsibilities didn't bother him any. Lane had been born to run big business enterprises.

Then he brought the other man over to Mab. "This is my cousin, Pierce Dalton. Pierce, my fiancée, Mab Tracy. You dropped in on the night of our engagement party."

Pierce looked a little dismayed. "Gosh, I didn't pick my visiting times very well, did I? I'm scarcely dressed for a formal clambake."

"That's all right," Lane said. "Dash upstairs and put on one of my outfits, if you like, then come down and dance. Have you had dinner?"

Pierce grinned. "A big steak at a highway stand. And yes, I would like to join the party." He smiled at Mab. "You're lovely. My cousin is a lucky guy. Lane, can I dance with her later?"

"Sure," Lane said. Pierce strode from the hall, up the stairs that led to the second floor.

DANCING WITH Lane a few moments later, Mab listened to his deep voice telling her about Pierce. "He's the son of my father's only brother. My Dad and Uncle John were entirely different in temperament. Dad was ambitious, Uncle John happy-go-lucky. So Dad built up a fortune, a business empire, really, while Uncle John batted around from pillar to post, broke half the time, but always happy. Pierce used to come and visit us every now and then during his childhood and adolescence, when the going got a little too rough for my uncle. But Uncle John always snapped back on top, and Pierce would return to his father after a month or so with us."

Lane sounded rather tolerant, as though he thought his uncle a somewhat foolish person for being so reckless and improvident. Mab frowned a little. She said, "I think your uncle sounds sort of—exciting. As though he'd be a lot of fun."

"He was that, all right. And Pierce is just like him. Pierce and I have always gotten along very well, though we disagree on just about everything. I take after Dad, while Pierce, as I said, is the image of Uncle John."

For one crazy moment, Mab thought, I wish you were Pierce, and Pierce was you. Then I wouldn't have to worry about fitting into Poppy City's snobbish Four Hundred. I could go off in a trailer with just you, and we'd have fun. We'd be completely free.

It made her all warm inside to think of living that kind of life with Lane. Perhaps his background of wealth and power had once held glamour for her when she first went to work for him, but now it was the Prince himself she wanted, not his royal trappings. Only there was no way of separating Lane from his background. He belonged to it, it was part of his life, his being.

A little while later, Pierce was downstairs again. He arrived at an interval between dances, and came over to Mab and Lane, smiling. He looked handsome in a dinner-coat of Lane's that fit his broad shoulders as though it had been tailored to his measure. The cousins were really incredibly alike, Mab thought, except for that sharp difference in coloring. And in temperament.

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Pierce said cheerfully, "May I have this one with Mab, Lane?"

"Sure. He's a good dancer, Mab, and won't ruin your slippers, in spite of that wild-Indian look he has just now."

Pierce rubbed his tanned, freshly-shaven cheek and laughed ruefully. "Oh, I've been in Florida this winter—picked up the gypsy tan there. Nice place, Florida. Got some swell photographs for a fisherman's magazine. And some swell fish for myself."

"Shhh. You're in California now, Bub. No treachery."

"Treachery, me eye. I'm not local. I'm a citizen of the whole United States. Nice place, the United States. I aim to see every inch of it before this present trip is over."

Mab's heart leapt. What fun it would be to go about the country with a car and trailer! She had never traveled, having lived in Poppy City all her life.

THEN THE MUSIC began, and Pierce took her in his arms. He wasn't as good a dancer as Lane, not quite as smooth, but he moved in an alive, animated way, and Mab followed him easily. After a few steps, he smiled down at her. "You do this well, lady."

"Thanks. So do you."

"No, you're wrong. Dancing isn't one of my talents. I like the outdoor stuff better."

She laughed. "Like fishing in Florida? and coon-hunting in the Deep South?"

His eyes warmed. "You said it. Say, you sound as though you like that sort of thing, too."

She grew a little sober. "I've never had a chance to try it. I've lived in this one town all my life."

"Do tell. Sounds dull, if you'll forgive my saying so."

"You're forgiven. Because it has been dull."

"Then why don't you leave?" But he caught himself quickly. "I forgot—there's Lane, isn't there?"

"Yes," she said slowly. "There's Lane."

He gave her a sharp look, but said nothing. Presently the dance ended, and they were standing close to an older woman whose name Mab didn't remember, a heavy, gray-haired, aristocratic dowager. The woman was saying to another who sat beside her, ". . . can't see what Lane has taken up with this commonplace little working girl for, when he could have had his pick of really worthwhile girls. You know that every debutante in Poppy City would have jumped at the chance of wearing his ring . . ."

Abruptly, Mab turned, and walked toward the door that led out on a terrace. She couldn't bear any more of that conversation, even though she knew it would stop abruptly when the women saw her, and they'd be terribly embarrassed. Not even for the pleasure of making them feel cheap would she remain. She had to get away immediately.

She'd forgotten Pierce until, out on the terrace, she realized that he had followed her. Then she said, "You mustn't leave the party. Go on back, and enjoy yourself. I . . ." Then suddenly, she was crying, slim hands over her face, slim body shaking.

Without a word, Pierce took her elbow, and steered her down shallow steps to a bench in the garden. The music sounded far-away now, and no one else was daring the cool March air. Despite her thin dress, however, she didn't feel cold. She seemed to be numb all over. Nothing about her was alive but her tears.

But when she stopped crying at last, she began to shiver, and Pierce took off his coat and put it around her. He looked strange and unconventional in shirt-sleeves, with the dress-suspenders over his broad shoulders. He said, "Feel like telling me about it now?"

She pushed back a lock of blonde hair drearily. "There's not much to tell that that high-nosed dowager's words didn't cover. You heard what she said."

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"Yeah." Pierce's tone was quiet, sympathetic.

Mab laughed harshly. "That's a sample of what I get all the time. Oh, not so openly, the Poppy City Four Hundred pride themselves on their good manners. It's usually just the sarcastic smile and the quiet freeze."

"You poor kid!" Now the sympathy in Pierce's voice was angry, vehement.

HIS BEING SO strongly on her side made Mab feel good. She felt a desire to pour out her heart to him. "Pierce, I'm crazy about Lane, but I wish he were like you—adventurous and gay, not weighted down with social position and responsibility. All of his friends, and even his—and your—Aunt Phoebe resent my marrying him because I haven't a wealthy, aristocratic background. They keep giving me a bad time."

Pierce's jaw squared. "Why doesn't Lane tell them off, put them in their places?"

"He doesn't know what's going on, I'm sure. Besides, what could he do? A man can't fight female cattiness. And these people are his friends."

"You're being silly. Lay it on the line with him. He'll protect you."

Mab's heart lightened suddenly. Yes, that was the solution. She'd discuss everything with Lane. As Pierce said, it was ridiculous of her not to have done so before.

She leaned toward Pierce a little, her eyes shining. And then his arms were around her suddenly and he was kissing her!

It was a strange sort of kiss. Mab hardly knew why she responded to it, or why she felt so upset by it. When Pierce lifted his mouth from hers, Mab looked up at him with reproachful eyes. "You shouldn't have done that, Pierce," she whispered reproachfully.

"I know. You're engaged to Lane, and I'm fond of Lane. But there's something in you that's wild and wanting-to-be-free. I think you're more my kind of girl than you are Lane's."

His voice was husky with emotion. Mab realized that he, too, had been affected by that kiss. Some sort of strange current seemed to be pulsing between them now.

But she must end this. She said, "You're wrong, Pierce. Lane is all that I want. It's true, there are drawbacks to marrying him, but life is never perfect. And everything will smooth out in time."

"Think so? Think you'll enjoy being a female stuffed shirt, like all the others? You weren't made to live that way, Mab."

Pierce spoke stubbornly. Mab refused to admit the echo his words had inside of her. She just didn't like Lane's snobbish friends, but so what? It was Lane she was marrying.

She stood up. "We'd better go back inside. And we'd better forget this happened, Pierce." She handed him back his coat.

He didn't answer. But he stood up and, still silent, followed her back into the house.

IT WASN'T long before she was dancing with Lane again, and when she was in his arms, Pierce's advice recurred to her—to tell Lane the situation frankly and ask him to protect her from snubs.

So as the dance ended, she said, "Lane, I'd like to talk to you alone for a few minutes."

He smiled down at her. "All right. You look serious. Anything wrong?"

"Nothing that can't be straightened out." Tucking her hand in the curve of his arm, she led him from the ballroom, across the hall, and into the dignified library.

A cheerful fire burned on the hearth, but the inviting room was empty. Everybody was dancing, it seemed. Mab was glad they could be alone here. She led Lane to the couch in front of the fire, and they sat down side by side.

Then she plunged into the story about the

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way the women of Lane's set, including his aunt, were snubbing her. But as she spoke, she suddenly became aware that it was hard to put her point across. Palpable insults sounded foolish when told, because they had been so subtly done. Even the thing that she had overheard tonight seemed merely the crusty remark of a snobbish old woman, not worth paying attention to.

When she finished, Lane looked a little puzzled. Then he said, "Honey, you're imagining things. Or if you are getting a few daggers tossed your way, it's because I've been regarded as somewhat of a catch in this town. You know what fond mamas are like." And he smiled down at her pleadingly, as though begging her to come out of some unreasonable mood.

She felt a queer uprush of despair. It was as she had thought. Men were prone to give feminine cattiness a brush-off, as being of no importance. She said, low, "Then you won't protect me?"

He frowned a little. "What do you expect me to do? Paying attention to things like that just makes them seem more important than they are. If you really are being snubbed—and I doubt it—the best thing to do is ignore what is said to you. Put yourself above it."

THAT SOUNDED good. Oh, very good, in theory. But Lane wasn't having neat little daggers stuck into him every time he turned around. Mab cried, "You don't know how hard all this is for me to bear. I'm marrying out of my class, and the local Four Hundred is out to rub in that fact—but good!"

Lane's frown deepened and he looked bothered. "Honey, I still really think you're imagining it because I've known these people all my life, and—"

She realized she couldn't bring the truth home to Lane. He was conditioned in the other direction. Mab interrupted almost rudely, "Probably I am imagining things. I'm sure they're lovely people. Now, shall we go back and dance?" She stood up abruptly.

Lane still looked bothered as he stood up, too. "Darling, I *know*—"

Again she interrupted. "I'm sure you do. And everything's all right, everything's marvelous. And I want to dance. Come on."

It was the first time she had ever been brusque and sarcastic with Lane. His face hardened. "Must you take that tone?"

Lane wasn't a person you toyed with, or pushed around. He had a rather terrible dignity, and a strong temper, though he usually kept the latter under tight control.

Mab was secretly a little bit afraid of Lane. But now she felt too let-down to care about anything but her own hurt. She said recklessly, "Maybe I should have taken it a long time ago."

Then, without waiting for Lane, she hurried out of the room. Though she had told him she felt like dancing, that was really the last thing she wanted to do. She wanted to get out of here, away from the snubs and the cruelty—and away from Lane's complete lack of sympathy with her problem.

It seemed pure fate that she ran into Pierce in the hall. She caught his arm. "Take me for a drive, Pierce, will you? Please?"

Black, sympathetic eyes scanned her face. Then Pierce nodded. "Okay. Come on."

Probably Lane had seen and heard the whole thing, for he'd been just behind her. But who cared? He would just think she felt like getting out for a while, he wouldn't tie her up with Pierce romantically. And if he did . . .

Mab was in the craziest, most reckless mood of her life. Although she really adored Lane, the idea of marrying him was beginning to make her feel like a person about to be sentenced to prison. The polite snubs and sneers—they were getting to be just too much!

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PIERCE'S CAR and trailer weren't parked in the overcrowded driveway. They were down the street a way. Mab exclaimed at sight of the stream-lined trailer. "What fun to travel around the country carrying your home with you!"

Pierce grinned. "Like a turtle. Seriously, though, it is fun. Or maybe I'm just two-thirds gypsy."

"Maybe I am, too," Mab said slowly. Rebellion was seething inside her.

Pierce gave her a quick glance. "Do you mean that?"

She shook her head from side to side in a bothered way. "I don't know what I mean just now. I'm all upset. Let's just ride for a while without talking, Pierce."

"Okay," he said. He helped her into the car and they started off.

A little way out of town he stopped the car. They were on a side road with practically no traffic. He said, "I'd like to show you the inside of the trailer—my home. It's really first-class, and I'm proud of it."

"All right," Mab said. She still felt upset. But it was nice to be away from the stuffy Dalton home, out here where it was peaceful and quiet.

The trailer *was* first-class. It was attractive and comfortable, and really, Mab thought, no one could want a nicer home. Looking around it wistfully, she thought, If only Lane were Pierce, and Pierce were Lane. Only I can't imagine Pierce being a stuffed shirt.

Was she calling Lane a stuffed shirt? Perhaps she was, Mab admitted to herself traitorously. Perhaps she was understanding the truth about him for the first time.

He was as bad as the others—the ones who had snubbed her. He was as blind and hidebound because he couldn't, or wouldn't, see things from her point of view.

A strange feeling of loss and tragedy went through her. Why did life have to be such a confused and sorrowful affair? If only things were simple and happy and easy to figure out.

Her unhappiness was growing. She'd better get home. She said, "Pierce, will you take me back to town? To my boarding-house, I'll show you where it is. I don't want to return to the party."

"Sure," Pierce said. She was thankful for his quietness, his sympathetic understanding.

Soon he was stopping his car in front of Mrs. O'Hara's. He helped her out and walked to the steps with her. There he stopped. He said, a funny wistfulness in his voice, "If I go up on the porch with you, I'll be kissing you again. And you don't want that, I know."

A FEELING of recklessness and rebellion went through Mab. She said, "And why shouldn't you kiss me?" She stood on tiptoe, there at the foot of the steps, and offered Pierce her soft mouth.

Then a hard voice from the porch made her turn quickly: "I hate to interrupt this touching scene, but I did want to talk to my fiancée."

"Lane!" Mab gasped. She stared at the tall man looming above as though he were an apparition.

"Yes, 'Lane'. I thought you'd have Pierce bring you home, so I came here to wait. I left my own engagement-party, just as you did. I wanted to make up with you. But now I'm hanged if I will!"

He was furious at her offering to kiss Pierce. For a moment, Mab felt guilty and miserable, then her own anger flared. She said, "So you're on your self-righteous throne again, Mr. Dalton? I might have expected it. But you can sit there alone. I don't belong on such exalted heights."

She took off her ring, and held it up to him. The glint of it in the moonlight made her throat ache, as though it held the sorrow of all her tears. But her hand didn't waver. She didn't want to marry Lane. It would be imprisoning to be his wife. She wouldn't be able to call her soul her own.

Lane's tall figure, so well-built and grace-

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ful, seemed to turn into an iron statue for a moment. Then he moved. He took the ring from her hand. He smiled one-sidely. "So it's going to end like this. Well, that's nice to know."

He made a little gesture. "Will you let me by, please? I gather you two will want to be alone."

His voice was dreadfully stiff and polite, his manner completely and cynically forbidding. A feeling of dreadful grief hit Mab like an avalanche, so that she gasped. But then pride and resentment came back, and she moved to one side and let Lane pass.

He swung down the steps and across the sidewalk to his parked car. How was it she hadn't noticed his car when they drove up, Mab thought bewilderedly. But then so many cars looked alike.

Lane drove away. Mab turned to Pierce, her mouth quivering. Pierce's black eyes were sympathetic, but he put out an eager hand to take hers. He said, "Mab, now that Lane is out of the picture..." He stared at her with questioning and doubtful hope.

She shook her head. "I don't know, Pierce. I'm all mixed up. Please go now, and come back tomorrow."

"All right." He smiled at her gently, and squeezed her hand. Then he, too, left.

MAB WENT INTO the house and slowly up to her room. She was glad Mrs. O'Hara had gone out this evening, so she wouldn't have to answer any questions. The other boarders seemed to be either out, too, or already asleep, for the house was almost completely dark.

In her room, Mab didn't even feel energetic enough to undress. Nor could she cry. She was filled with a dreary hopelessness, the way one feels when all roads to happiness seem closed forever and desolate.

She lay down on her bed, limp and discouraged. Her whole body felt numb and uncaring. She thought, I wish I could go to sleep and never wake up again. Life is such a mess.

She'd leave Poppy City, go to San Francisco, and get another job. Even if Lane wouldn't give her a reference, after their quarrel and break-up, she was sure she could still find something. She was a very efficient secretary and job opportunities were opening up marvelously these days, she'd heard.

Her thoughts wandered on drearily and

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almost aimlessly. Nothing seemed to have any savor now that Lane was gone. How tragic that you could love a man when you knew that to marry him would make you desperately unhappy.

Time passed. When she heard Mrs. O'Hara come in, she snapped off her light until she knew the older woman had gone to bed. Mab didn't want her tapping on the door to ask how the engagement party had gone, and why she was home so early in the evening.

She turned the light on again and walked restlessly to her bay window which looked down on the little garden at one side of the house. Through the open window she heard a car stop, somewhere close. Then she heard footsteps on concrete and a man came along the walk that entered the garden. Moonlight gleamed on a blond head, and a lean face looked up at her window. Then he bent over to pick up some gravel from the side of the path. Mab realized that he was going to throw it at her window to attract her attention.

"Lane!" she called. Her heart was rioting inside her. Why had he come back? But she was almost beyond questioning his return, she was so terribly glad to see him again!

As she spoke, she pushed the window higher and thrust out her own blonde head. Lane's face changed wonderfully when he saw her. He said, "Mab, I've come back—if you'll have me."

SHE BEGAN to tremble. Lane's voice was humble, pleading, repentant. He went on, "Now I know you were right about Aunt Phoebe's attitude toward you. When I told her I'd quarreled with you, after I got back, she launched into a regular tirade about you. You were right—my friends did resent you."

Mab caught her breath. Now Lane knew she had told the truth; he knew that she hadn't exaggerated. Lane continued, "I was so angry, I really told her off, put her in her place. I said the engagement wasn't over, after all, that I was going to come to you and apologize, and see if you'd take me back. I forbade her to mention our quarrel to anybody and warned her to see to it that you got a welcome from everybody when I did bring you to the house again." His voice softened a little. "Aunt Phoebe really loves me, even if she is a little high-nosed and stiff-backed. She'll cooperate from now on."

Mab felt incredulously happy. Everything was all right. She cried, "Oh, Lane, this was all I wanted to make everything perfect!"

Then she sobered. "I want to explain about Pierce..."

"I know," Lane said. "Pierce told me there was no occasion for jealousy, that you really loved me, but were upset about the attitude of my friends toward you." He smiled a little. "Pierce drove on tonight, after I told him about my quarrel with Aunt Phoebe. Pierce and I have always talked things over like brothers. I thought it best to be frank with him and find out what the score was. He said he wished us both all the best luck in the world."

Mab's lips trembled a little. Pierce had really been attracted to her, she knew. But he'd get over it. After all, there was a whole world full of girls and he'd find one of his own freedom-loving kind one of these days.

As for herself, she wouldn't be losing freedom when she married Lane. The results of her quarrel with him had straightened everything out. He'd protect her from snubs from now on; he'd protect her from everything that might in any possible way hurt her.

She said, "Don't move. I'll be right down." Withdrawing her head from the window, she hurried across the room, and almost ran down the stairs. She wanted to get to Lane as quickly as possible—and to his welcoming kiss.

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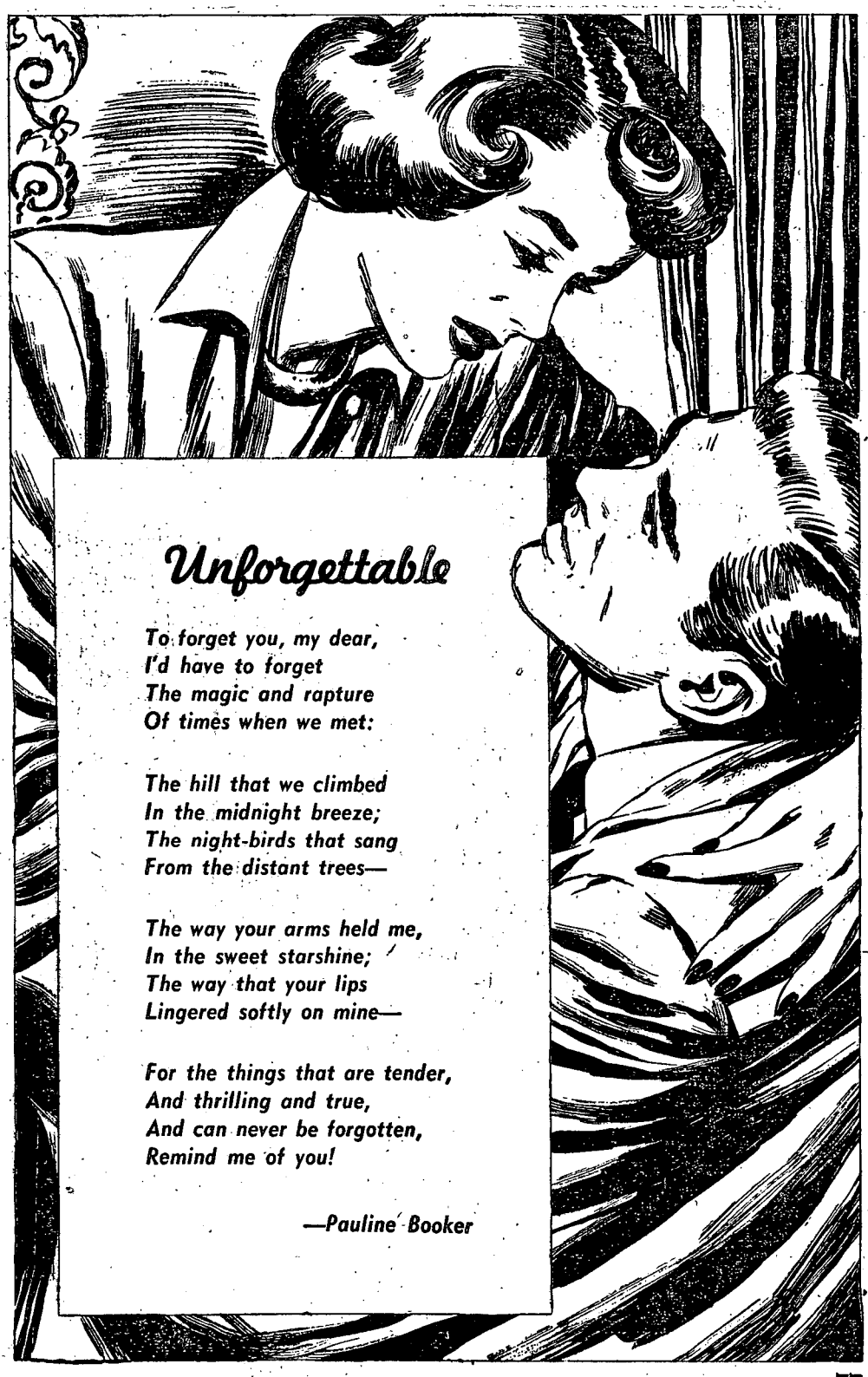

Unforgettable

To forget you, my dear,
I'd have to forget
The magic and rapture
Of times when we met:

The hill that we climbed
In the midnight breeze;
The night-birds that sang
From the distant trees—

The way your arms held me,
In the sweet starshine;
The way that your lips
Lingered softly on mine—

For the things that are tender,
And thrilling and true,
And can never be forgotten,
Remind me of you!

—Pauline Booker

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9357 An easy to make three piece outfit. The sunsuit is one piece, opens flat! Sizes 1-5. Size 2 cape, 1¼ yards 39 inch; frock 1½ yards 35 inch; sunsuit ⅞ yard.

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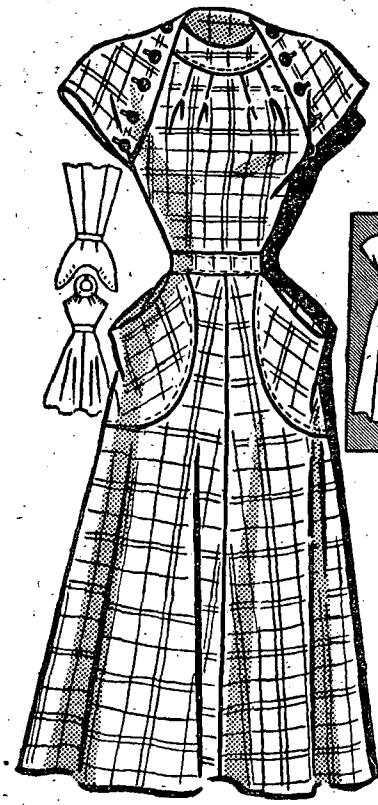
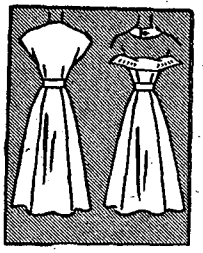
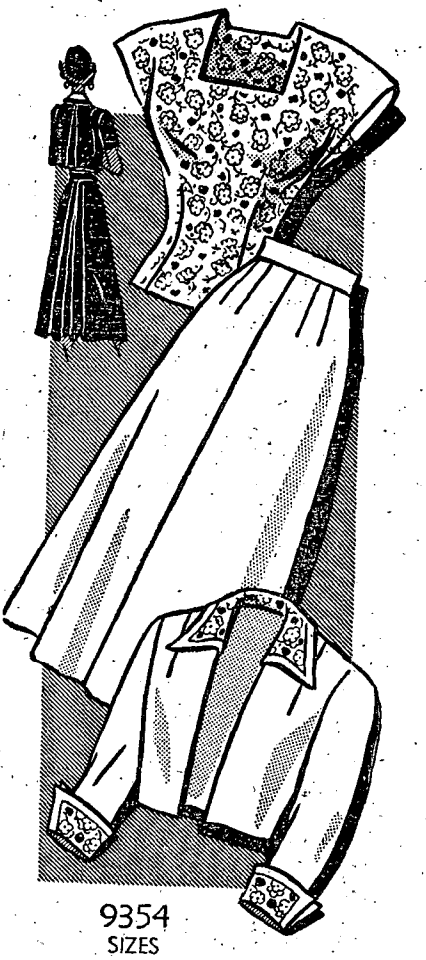


9310
SIZES
12—20



9310 A double purpose dress! Unbutton for summer suntanning—button up for town wear. Sizes 12-20. Size 16 takes 4¼ yards 35 inch fabric.



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12—20

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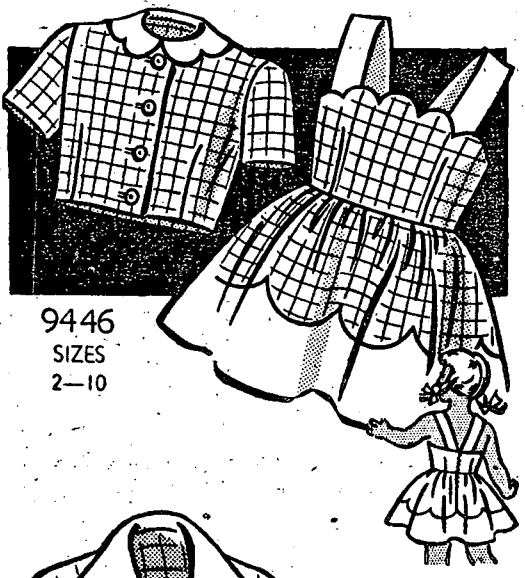
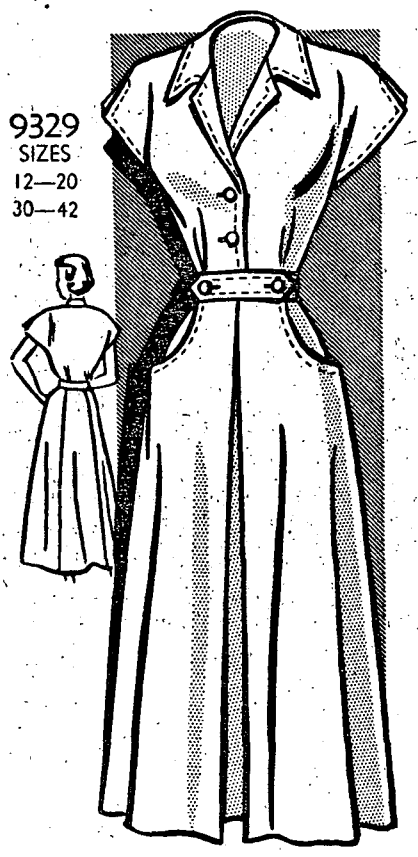
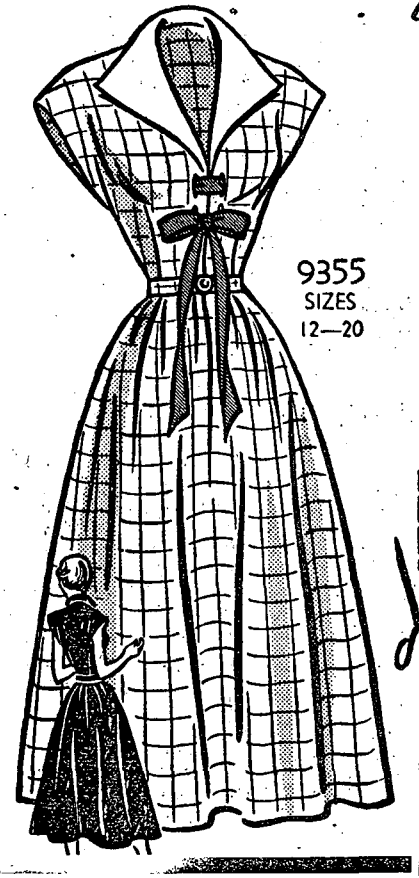


9446
SIZES
2—10



9329
SIZES
12—20
30—42



9355
SIZES
12—20

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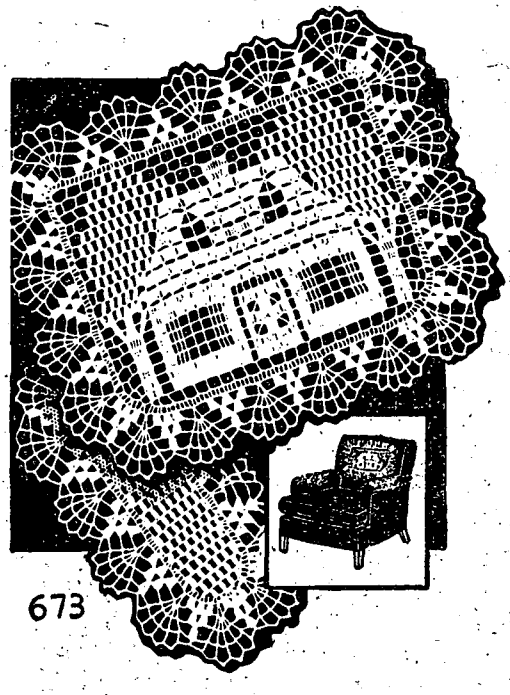

673

673 A chair set that's easy crocheting and good looking too. In plain crochet with petal stitch for trees. Crochet the center, then add edging. Directions given.

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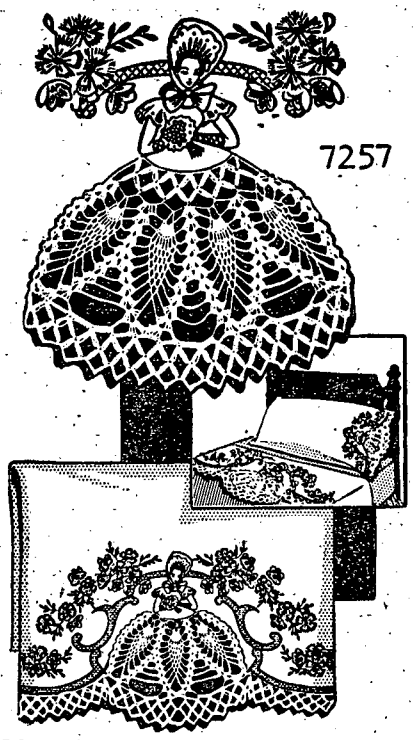
7329 An easy to do afghan done in scraps of gay knitting worsted. Useful as well as ornamental! Pattern 7329; directions. Done mainly in shell stitch with a large hook.



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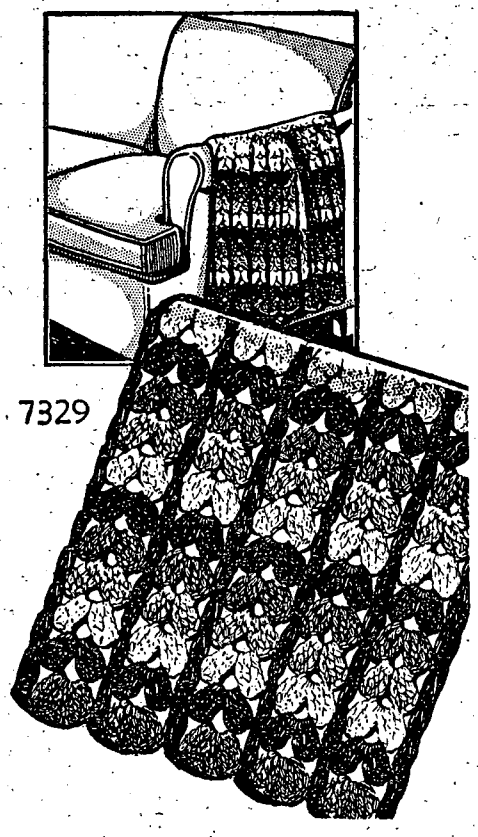

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982 Three potholder patterns in one! A useful gift. Spider-web design and plain crochet in two colors! Simple crocheted potholders, each in 2 sections; directions.

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Back Door to Romance

By VIRGINIA NIELSEN

Lois' head demanded a man she could respect—but her heart paid no attention.

THE PLACE was a madhouse as usual. It was not a home, Lois thought scornfully. It was a cross between bedlam and a hotel. That was a movie star's house—a wacky hotel.

At her secretary's desk and switchboard in the upstairs hall Lois had her brisk, clever fingers on the pulse of the whole establishment. More than that. Her desk was the heart of the house.

If it has a heart, she thought, one hand wearily brushing the hair back from her temple while with the other she supported the telephone.

"I don't care if you have to send to New Guinea, as long as they are here Friday," she said into the instrument. "Fly them. Use the Clipper. Miss Hill has

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instructed me to spare no expense. But they must be here!"

"What is it this time?" said a deep, lazily amused voice, as she put down the phone.

Lois turned quickly, a flush coming into her cheeks. "Peacocks!" she said a little snappishly to hide the tremor of emotion that always surged through her when she saw Jed Masters. "Two dozen of them!"

He raised his eyebrows. He was not handsome by Hollywood standards. His nose was a little too broad for beauty, his profile irregular and satisfyingly masculine after the smooth-faced actors who continually came and went in Sandra Hill's house.

But his eyes were a deep, level blue, and his smile was utterly charming, and something about the square, solid look of his hands made Lois feel dizzy with a longing to reach out and touch them.

All of which made her furious with herself, for Jed Masters was definitely Sandra's man. And she knew positively, whether he did or not, that Sandra was nearly twice his age. It seemed a little indecent.

ANOTHER party?" he asked, as though he did not know.

"I telegraphed your invitation," Lois said, scanning the list on her desk. "I haven't received your acceptance."

"Sandra knows I hate her brawls." Negligently, he pushed aside the papers, letters, and telegrams and sat on a corner of her desk staring at the party list.

"Miss Hill is at the swimming pool," Lois said, pointedly, as the telephone buzzed again.

"Get her for me, will you?"

"Yes, Western Union," she said, into the instrument. "Go ahead." Wired acceptance and regrets had been pouring in all day. She checked off names on her list while he sat gently kicking his heels against her desk.

The call completed, she rang the bathhouse. When Sandra's throaty voice said, "Yes?" she said, "Mr. Masters, Miss Hill," and handed him the house phone.

"Hello, darling," he said, and the endearment in his deep voice stabbed her heart.

She went on telephoning as he talked. New York was waiting to talk to Miss Hill. The caterers had a dozen questions to be settled. The florist was being temperamental about the decorations. Her head ached from the terrific responsibility that was on her to see that every least detail was right.

Sandra had only to say lazily, "I have a wonderful idea for a lawn party. Peacocks marching down the terrace steps. Dozens of them. Beautiful, isn't it? I dreamed it."

And off she would go to the studio, leaving her secretary to scour the country through pet shops and aviaries for enough peacocks to satisfy her whim, besides setting in order all the machinery for lavish entertainment.

Lois was trying to keep her mind on the party, trying not to hear what Jed Masters was saying. But she could no more close her ears to his voice than she could close her heart to his charm.

"I can't talk to you with all those screaming idiots underfoot," he said into the telephone. "I'll wait for you in your room."

He was masterful, Lois thought painfully, and Sandra ate it up. No one else could order her around that way.

"Let me talk to her," she said, and when he handed her the telephone, "Miss Hill, they are ready with New York."

"Put it through to my room," Sandra drawled. "I'll be over directly."

YOU KNOW, you have an awfully cute nose," Jed Masters said, regarding Lois thoughtfully. "I like the way it turns up."

"Thank you, Mr. Masters!" she said.

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"My friends call me Jed."

"How interesting, Mr. Masters."

"You don't get the idea," he protested, in a grieved tone. "I said, my friends call me . . ."

"I'm very busy," Lois said, but her voice trembled a little.

He studied her flushed face. "Why can't we be friends, Lois?"

"We are friends, Mr. Masters," she said, picking up the telephone.

He drew the lapels of his coat together and gave a mock shiver. "Brrrr! What a warm friendship!" he said.

While she handled several calls and consulted the cook about dinner which might be served to two or twenty at Sandra's whim, he sat on the desk, his eyes following every movement of her hands, every expression of her face.

She was terribly aware of him, so aware that it was painful to have him so near. Her mouth grew a little taut, and there was a desperation screened by the lashes sweeping down over her eyes.

"You like me more than you're willing to admit, my dear," he observed, after a queer tense moment.

Her breath caught in her throat, and the telltale color washed up from the V of her soft, tailored blouse.

To her intense relief, the moment was broken by Sandra, who came running lightly up the stairs in a stunning, color-splashed bathing suit with a white beach cape hanging off one beautiful brown shoulder.

SANDRA was glamour itself, Lois thought, with a sharp twist of jealousy. Jed Masters had turned away from her and was advancing to meet the star.

She wanted to scream at him, Don't you know that that lovely rosy tan all came out of a bottle? Don't you remember that Sandra was a blonde last year? Haven't you guessed that her dark, flowing hair appeared because the studio decided a brunette make-up would hide the tell-tale signs of age creeping into her face?

Somebody ought to tell him. Someone should remind him of the difference in their ages.

But in spite of everything, Sandra had something that few women have, something that was part beauty and part the wonderful poise that came from believing she was irresistible.

She lifted her face to Jed now and said in her husky voice, "Darling!" And Jed kissed her.

Lois turned quickly back to her desk. Arm in arm, they walked into Sandra's boudoir sitting room. Over her shoulder, Sandra said, "I'll take that New York call now."

"Yes, Miss Hill," Lois said, dully, staring at the door which closed behind them.

Only one other man was allowed in Sandra's private suite and that was her producer. Carl Kingsley had a certain right to be closeted with Sandra, perhaps. At least you could imagine that they were talking business, discussing Sandra's new roles, planning publicity and such pertinent things.

But Jed Masters was an aviator and had nothing to do with Sandra's career. He hated Hollywood. He jeered at it constantly, and criticized Sandra for being a part of its spurious glamour.

So what were they talking about in the long, undisturbed hours they spent together?

Sandra stressed their business relationship when she spoke of Carl Kingsley, but she had never explained Jed in any such way.

Lois put her hand to her throbbing head. I've got to get out of here, she thought. I can't stay in this house and watch him come and go, feeling the way I do.

What she meant was loving him the way she did. For she did love Jed, mad though it was.

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SHE HATED herself for it. It was somehow shameful to love a man you had no respect for. You could have no respect for yourself, loving a man who was obviously completely fooled by a woman like Sandra Hill.

And yet, what could you do? How could you keep your balance in this crazy place where nothing was according to the rules?

You can go away! Lois told herself furiously, jabbing at her desk pad with her pencil. You can give up this perfectly swell, perfectly wacky job and go so far away you will never hear his name mentioned again.

She didn't want to go. After all, her job was a unique one and very well paid. But there were limits to what a girl could stand. And she couldn't stand seeing Jed kiss Sandra Hill much longer without cracking up.

The telephone was buzzing, but Lois, scowling, went on jabbing her sharp pencil into her desk pad until a hand reached over her shoulder and captured her fingers.

"Oh!" she said, swinging around. "I didn't hear you come up, Mr. Kingsley."

Sandra Hill's producer smiled down at her and went on holding her hand. He was a man of Sandra's age or a little older, handsome in a distinguished way, with a tan a shade deeper than Sandra's own, a very black mustache and black hair only faintly grayed at the temples.

He and Jed Masters were the two men the servant downstairs always admitted. In fact, Lois thought acidly, they both acted as if the house were their own.

"You're much too pretty to scowl like that," Carl Kingsley told her.

"You know perfectly well I'm not pretty," Lois said, jerking her hand away and picking up the telephone. "Miss Hill's residence."

Kingsley waited until she had told the florist that they must have camellias and that no substitute would do. Then he said, "I've never seen Sandra's little jewel upset before. What is it?"

"Oh, peacocks, and things," Lois said, blinking tears.

His expression didn't change. That was one of the wackiest things about the place, Lois thought. The wacky was taken so matter-of-factly.

"Funny thing," he observed, "when a woman's unhappy, she's sure she hasn't a good feature. But I'm an expert, you know. You needn't try to tell me you're not pretty."

"And you needn't try to tell me that Sandra Hill would have me around if I were pretty," she said, shortly.

He laughed. "Ah, but Sandra's long suit is glamour," he said. "You aren't glamorous, my dear, but you have something that is even more important today.

"You have youth and individuality, and a certain freshness. There's sparkle in your eyes and piquancy in the way your nose turns up. Your hair is really beautiful, with tints that should photograph nicely. In short, you're the average man's idea of what the average American girl should be. I wouldn't be surprised if I were on the verge of discovering you, Lois."

He leaned over the desk toward her. "You would like to be discovered, wouldn't you?"

Lois said a little tartly. "Are you just working up to an invitation to dinner, Mr. Kingsley? Because, if you are . . ."

"That's an idea," he drawled, amused. He captured her hand again and bent closer, until he could look deeply into her eyes. "Blue-green, and full of spirit. Not bad, not bad at all."

"Carl!"

THEY BOTH turned quickly, guiltily. Sandra's door had opened without making any sound and she stood facing them with her bosom heaving and her eyes flashing, unmistakable signs of one of the rages for which she was famous.

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"Must you humiliate me like this in my own house?" she demanded cuttingly, dramatically.

Lois stood up with a feeling of facing a firing squad. Sandra's most publicized trait was her jealousy and intolerance of other women. She had almost no women friends. And for a woman who woked for her to give any of the men who called on Sandra even a fleeting glance was high treason.

"Don't excite yourself, my dear," Carl Kingsley said suavely. "I've just hit on a wonderful idea. You're going to discover Miss Long."

"I'm going to discover her!" Sandra shrieked. "I discovered her long ago. She's a good secretary. You leave her alone, do you hear? Strictly alone!"

At least he had diverted her attention, Lois thought gratefully. Second only to stealing a man from her was the crime of trying to steal one of Sandra's servants.

"Look, darling," Carl said, with an air of supreme patience, "I'm thinking about you. Do you know what Hollywood women say over their teacups about you? That you're a jealous cat. That you've never shown another woman a kindness. And do you think the women of Hollywood are not important? I'm telling you for your own good, you had better do something to scotch their tattle. Your box office is none too good as it is."

SANDRA was suddenly calm, her tantrum cut short by the cold precision with which he spoke. Where business was concerned, Sandra could control her emotions.

"Do you have to discuss my boxoffice where all the servants can hear you?" she asked, her voice like the lash of a whip. "Come in here. You, too, Miss Long."

Lois switched the telephone line to the butler's telephone and followed Sandra into her sitting room.

Jed Masters had moved to one of Sandra's wide windows overlooking the English garden and was smoking, his back turned to the rest of them. Lois tried not to look at him, but her eyes strayed to his straight, broad-shouldered figure and her heart did crazy tricks just watching the casual gestures he made smoking.

Sandra said, "Now, what's on your mind, Carl? Or are you just trying to think up a fast one? You were holding her hand."

"And who wouldn't?" Jed asked pleasantly, from the window.

"Shut up!" Sandra screamed at him.

Even when they quarreled it was evident how close they were, how thoroughly used to each other. Lois thought, desperation growing in her. And I used to think it was fun to work here.

"We'll give out a statement that you have requested the studio to give your secretary a screen test," Carl said. "If it's any good, and I have a hunch it will be, there'll be more publicity about it, of course. And believe me, it will be publicity you need, sweetheart."

Sandra's eyes were coldly furious on them both.

She hates me, Lois thought. She knew it was true. Sandra hated her because she had youth, because the best part of her life was all before her.

But to her surprise, Sandra assented, making a quick decision.

"It's in your hands, Carl," she said. "Don't bother me about it again. You may go, Miss Long."

"You haven't asked her what she thinks about it," Jed Masters said.

"I'm not asking her, I'm telling her," Sandra said, her anger breaking through again. "You're still working for me, Miss Long."

Lois said, "Yes, Miss Hill," and walked out of the room.

BACK AT her desk, she stood for a moment looking unseeing down at the work piled up awaiting her. Why hadn't she told Sandra that she wasn't working

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for her any more? Why didn't she walk out of this house and take her foolish, unmanageable heart with her?

She knew the answer and it made her heartsick. Because of her she could see Jed Masters. Just see him—and each time it meant fresh pain.

She wanted to lay her head on her arms and weep. Instead, she said, You're a fool, Lois Long! and picked up the telephone. There was still the wine and liquor to check on and extra help to be hired.

Jed came out of Sandra's suite while she was talking to the employment agency. He paused at her desk as she put down the phone. His blue eyes were sober, yet warm on her.

"Don't let them spoil you, Lois," he said. "You're nice just as you are."

But you prefer Sandra, she thought, bitterly. She said flippantly, across her telephane, "Thanks, mister!"

"In fact, as I've mentioned before, I'd like to take you dancing," he said.

Dancing—in his arms—music and wine and laughter. One of these days she would weaken. She turned her head sharply away from him. "Sorry, I'm not having any."

He waited, his eyes questioning, a little expectant. "I think I could change your mind," he said at last.

She pretended not to hear him, but she paled. The telephone buzzed and she picked it up quickly. A fan magazine writer wanted an interview with Sandra. It was a man Lois had met and she was feverishly cordial, cupping both hands around the telephone and leaning back in her chair as she talked.

Jed's eyes narrowed on her. Suddenly, putting his hands over both of hers on the telephone, he bent over her and touched his lips to hers for an unexpected, electric moment.

The sweet shock of it went all through her, a melting weakness that made her lips tremble and strange tears start to her eyes.

She gasped angrily, "Why, you impertinent, conceited, low Romeo, you!"

A startled voice said over the telephone, "I beg your pardon?"

Her cheeks were bright. She stammered into the instrument, "I—I'm sorry! I didn't mean you."

Grinning, Jed saluted her and ran down the stairs.

CARL SENT some studio photographers to take pictures of Sandra posing beside Lois's desk, and the takes were published in papers all over the country with the caption:

Star Asks Screen Test for Secretary

Lois went without her lunch to make the test, her mind busy all the while on the hundred and one last details of Sandra's party.

The next day the first of the peacocks were delivered. She went out on the terrace in a blue smock and released them. Sitting back on her heels, she admired their beautiful fanlike tails and wondered helplessly how she could manage them to give Sandra the effect she wanted.

The sun shone down on the terrace, burnishing her soft, shining hair and giving bronze overtones to the lovely blue-green of the bird's magnificent plumage.

She was coaxing them toward her with breadcrumbs from her pocket when a familiar voice said, "Don't move. Stay just as you are." She turned to see Jed standing above her on the flagstones.

"I'm taking a picture of you," he explained.

"With an invisible camera, I suppose," Lois said tartly.

"This is a purely private picture to be filed away in my memory," he said. "You know, it's a pity you don't like me better. We could have such fun if you would only fall in love with me."

"I'll keep it in mind in case I get bored."

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And then, just to remind herself he hadn't come to see her, "Miss Hill is at the studios."

He ignored her reference to Sandra. "I'm taking a honey of a new ship up this afternoon on a sort of trial flight," he said, smiling down at her with an oddly diffident charm. "Would you like to go up with me? You know, everything looks different from the air. Maybe you would like me up there."

The familiar ache was back in her heart, the old longing and her bitter rebellion against it. Why couldn't she hate him as she should?

"It's worth a gamble, isn't it?" he said, with a note that was almost wistful in his voice.

Lois averted her head. "No," she said.

For a moment longer he stood looking down at her, then he said, "Tell Sandra I couldn't wait, will you?" and walked rapidly away from her.

TEARS blurring her eyes as she listened to his retreating footsteps, I've got to get away, she thought again, with a sharper despair.

A few moments later a car drove up the circular, climbing driveway with Carl Kingsley and Sandra sitting in the back seat. Carl leaned forward and spoke to the driver when he saw Lois.

The car stopped and he jumped out and strode across the grass toward her, leaving Sandra to follow more slowly. His dark eyes were flashing with excitement and his vigorous gestures startled the birds who scattered, crying in their shrill, unlovely voices.

"It's perfect!" Kingsley exclaimed. "Perfect!"

"What are you talking about?" Sandra demanded coldly.

He waved a hand widely, frightening the birds even more. "Can't you see it?" he said, "I want pictures, color pictures. It's magnificent. Lois in peacock blue, surrounded by the birds. Sandra, you're a genius, positively a genius!"

"I'm a sucker letting you get away with the best secretary I ever had," Sandra said bitterly.

Lois had risen to her feet and was looking from one to the other, bewildered.

"Your test was not bad, not bad at all," Carl told her. "I've decided to make you a baby star."

Dazed, Lois protested, "But I've never acted in my life!"

SHE HADN'T thought it would go beyond the publicity stage, and apparently Sandra, whose acid resentment was in her eyes, hadn't foreseen this, either.

"The question is, do you want to?" Kingsley asked her. "You will have to take many lessons and study hard."

Lois hesitated. Only a moment ago she had been wanting desperately to leave her job, to get out of Sandra Hill's house. "Yes," she said.

"Fine. Report to the studio tomorrow," Carl said.

"Are you crazy?" Sandra cried. "I can't let her go like this. There's the party!"

"The party," Carl echoed, his face lighting up. "That's it, of course! That's what you got the peacocks for, isn't it? We'll introduce her with them. The Peacock Girl! Sandra, you're wonderful!"

Sandra's eyes blazed. "Do you think I'm going to give away a publicity idea like that?" she cried. "What do you think I am, Carl Kingsley, a fool? I thought of those peacocks. If anybody is going to be a peacock girl around here, I am!"

"Listen, my dear . . ." Carl began.

Sandra shrieked, "If you tell me again that my box office is terrible, I'll tear you limb from limb!"

Carl gave Lois an unhappy glance and shrugged.

Sandra turned on her. "What are you hanging around those birds for?" she cried. "Can't you do something in the house?"

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Lois emptied the last breadcrumbs from her pocket. "Yes," she said tightly, and left the two on the terrace. When she looked back from the house Sandra was still shrieking with anger.

But in the end, Carl had his way, and Sandra's peacock party was the launching of Lois's new career. The studio designed her gown, an extravagant, glittering thing inspired by peacock feathers, and also dictated her new hair-do and her make-up.

Carl had said she was an average American girl, but looking at herself in a long mirror the night of the party, Lois realized that there was nothing average about the way she looked now.

The dress revealed each exquisite curve of her figure, and her hair rolled softly back to accent the lovely oval of her face and the slim line of her throat.

The studio had taken the party arrangements out of her hands, and so she waited in her bedroom, chill with nervousness, wondering if Jed would be among the watching guests.

At last a servant came for her, and she went down to the appointed place.

IT WAS A bizarre, exciting moment. Huge spotlights illumined the terrace, shining into her eyes so that she could not see the crowded watchers as she slowly descended the terrace with the peacocks massed behind her. But she heard the sigh that rippled through them as she appeared and a moment later their thunderous applause.

Carl Kingsley was the first to reach her side. "You were gorgeous," he said, squeezing her hand.

Afterward, Sandra introduced her everywhere as her protegée, playing the role of an enthusiastic and gracious sponsor so beautifully that only a few women who knew her well might guess at the jealousy that Lois felt in her every word and smallest glance.

For almost a year Lois had stood on the edge of the social whirl that was Hollywood. Tonight she was in the midst of it, and it was heady as the champagne Sandra was serving, for everybody who mattered came to Sandra's parties.

And yet Lois found herself watching for the one face that mattered. Jed had said that he hated Sandra's brawls. There was no reason why she should look for him, and yet, she was taut with expectancy.

At last she saw him, standing a little apart, watching her with a bitter smile curving his lips. Reckless with champagne and the attention that had been showered on her, she deliberately went to his side, striving for nonchalance.

"HELLO," she said, tipping her bright head to one side. "I thought you didn't like Sandra's parties."

"I don't," he said. "And I dislike this one more than most of them."

"Then why did you come?"

He looked down at her a moment in silence. "For this," he said, and held out his arms.

A name orchestra was playing and the music came muted and sweet across the grass. As one bewitched she slipped into his arms, and they danced.

There was a perilous sweetness in being so close to him.

She thought, This is the last time I will see him, and recklessly let herself drift with the exquisite moment.

"Peacock Girl!" he said, and the scorn in his voice shattered her sweet momentary peace. "It's a good name for any Hollywood woman. Preening vanity and shrill selfishness. I thought you were different, and now I find you going Hollywood, just like all the rest of them!"

Lois said resentfully, "You don't seem able to stay away from it."

"That's different," he said. "I can't help what Sandra is. But I thought you were someone special."

Her heart twisted with pain. He made

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it so obvious that Sandra came first. And still he wanted to make love to her.

"Women are all alike, I guess," he finished bitterly. "They can't resist the idea of dressing up and parading glamour."

"And men are all alike," she flared. "They can't resist the glamour."

His mouth tightened. "No?" he said.

They had stopped dancing. His arms dropped away from her and they faced each other, strained and taut.

"Sorry to disappoint you," he said, with a polite little inclination of his head, and walked away, leaving her helpless with painful anger.

SHE DID not see him again that night, nor in the busy days that followed. There were a hundred things to be learned it seemed, and she worked unceasingly, hoping in work to forget she ever had known a flyer with level, blue eyes and a charming sort of homeliness.

She had moved into a small apartment, and since her world was a totally different one now, she did not see Sandra and her friends any more. The only connection she had with her old life as Sandra's secretary was through Carl Kingsley.

He followed her progress closely, frequently telephoning her encouragement and advice. Sandra didn't bother, apparently feeling she had done more than enough.

After a few weeks, Carl said, "We can't have Hollywood forgetting the Peacock Girl, Lois. You should be seen in some of the night spots around town."

And because he convinced her it was important for her career and because she was achingly lonely when her working day was over, Lois began going out with Carl Kingsley.

It was not long before columnists began mentioning the Peacock Girl and observing that the producer was her frequent companion. Fan magazines became aware of her, and pictures of her began to appear, although as yet the studio had given her no role, and she was still studying.

The only thing she heard about Jed for some time was that he had developed an improved design for a certain type of plane which was attracting the attention of the aviation industry. Carl told her that one night when she could not resist asking him about Jed.

A few nights later she saw him, with heart-stopping unexpectedness. She walked with Carl into a night club at about midnight and ran into Sandra and Jed.

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SHE STOOD very still, paling beneath her make-up, her eyes hungry on his face. The suddenness of their meeting had shaken her control and for a moment she could neither move nor speak.

Then she became aware that the other three were held in the same shocked tension, that not one of them seemed able to break the strained silence.

Jed looked a little pale. Carl was moistening his lips. The set of Sandra's lovely mouth was harsh and bitter. And the unnatural stillness that gripped them had spread over the whole watching room.

Sandra broke it. With her eyes blazing and the rouge standing out in patches on her pale cheeks she stepped forward and slapped Lois across the mouth.

Lois stepped backward, crying out in shock and pain. And then things happened very quickly. It had all taken place near the entrance. Carl moved like lightning, bodily forcing Sandra outside before the torrent of abuse they all knew was trembling on her tongue could escape her lips.

People stood up and crowded toward the door, hoping to see the star in one of her notorious rages. Ahead of their surge forward, Jed swept Lois outside, too.

Carl was putting a shrieking, struggling Sandra into a taxi. Jed summoned another and Lois, still dazedly holding her stinging lips, found herself speeding away.

"You had it coming," he said grimly.

Lois gasped. "But I don't understand!"

"Then it's time you were told a few things. What's your address?"

She told him and he leaned forward and spoke to the driver.

SHE WAS trembling with shock and the sweet pain of his nearness. Numbly she let him take her home and follow her into her apartment.

Then he said contemptuously, "It probably won't make any difference, but I think you should know that you are making Sandra a most unhappy woman."

Lois stared at him. "I am?"

But he did not let her protest as he continued with a cold sort of fury. "You're on the upswing, but Sandra's best days are over, and in her heart she knows it. Her career is at its end, and to a woman like Sandra that is the bitterest humiliation in life."

A resentment was rising in Lois. All the old jealous torment of seeing Jed come and go in Sandra's private suite swept over her, and all the smarting little hurts Sandra had thoughtlessly and selfishly inflicted came back to her. She said callously, "So what?"

Jed's face went a shade paler and a shade grimmer. "Don't you know what people are saying?" he flung at her. "They're saying that Sandra gave you your chance, and now you're paying her back by stealing her man.

"You must have known she loved Carl Kingsley," he said bitterly. "For years he has begged her to marry him. She wouldn't do that, but he has been the person closest to her, the one she has depended on. And now when her career is skidding out from under her, when her impulse and her need is to turn to Carl, you've caught his interest."

Lois's eyes were round and dazed.

"I wouldn't say anything if I thought you cared. But I know Carl is just a stepping stone to you. And you're spoiling his chance for happiness, too, for he loves Sandra."

"But if Carl is the man Sandra loves, where do you come in?" Lois cried out.

He stopped short, staring at her. For a moment there was a fateful silence. Then he said shakenly, "But I thought you knew. Sandra is my mother."

THE ROOM seemed to whirl around her. "Your mother!" she said. And then brokenly, "Oh, Jed!"

"But what did you think?" he said.

(Please turn to page 109)

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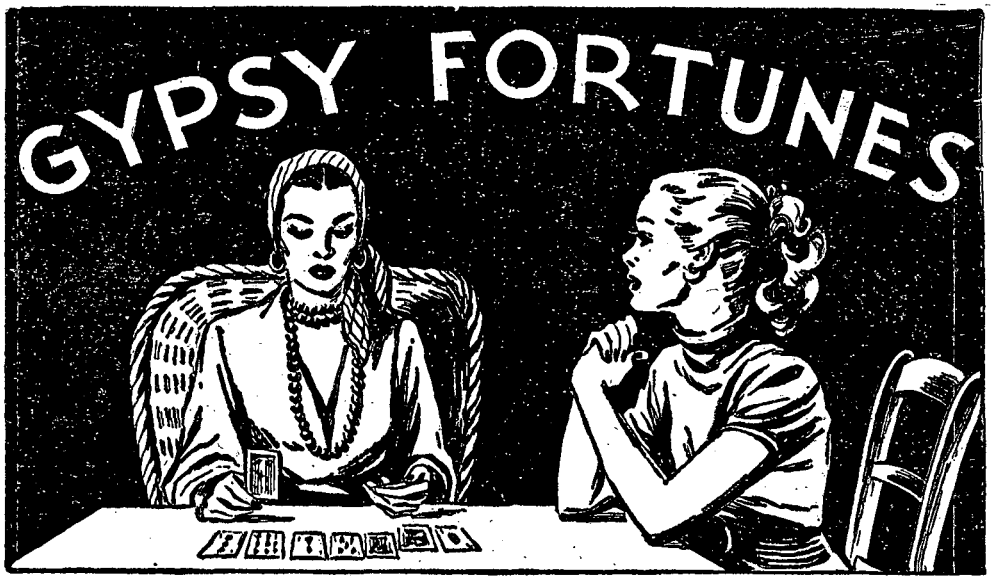
GYPSY FORTUNES



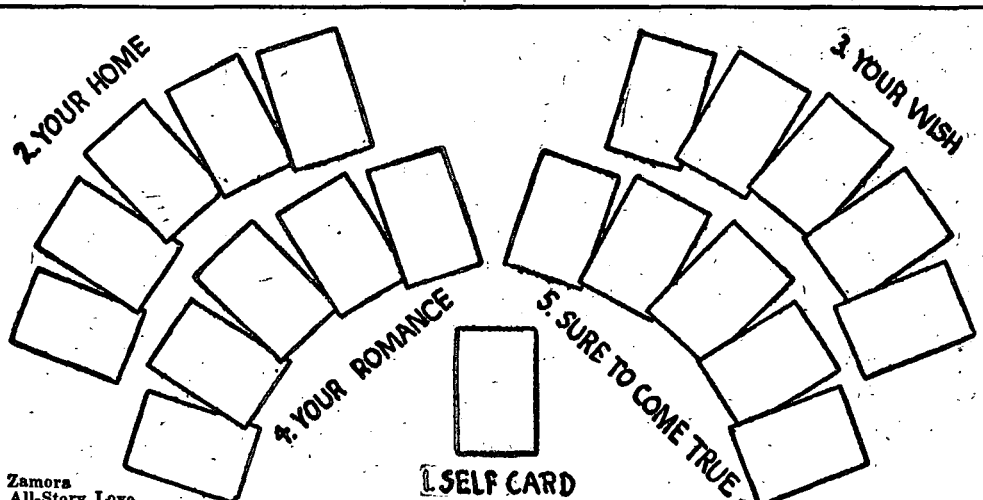
Cross Zamora's palm with silver—fifteen cents will do—and she will tell you a real gypsy fortune.

Select the card that represents you from a bridge deck: Queen of Diamonds if you are a very blonde woman; King if you are a man; Hearts if you are a medium blonde; Clubs if you are medium brunette, and Spades if you have black hair and black eyes. List that card in the space marked No. 1.

Now make a wish. Shuffle the full bridge deck with the self card withdrawn. Spread them in a horseshoe and select any twenty-one cards.

Lay them out in four piles of five cards each and you will have one card left. That is the surprise card.

Fill out the diagram and the coupon and send them with fifteen cents and a stamped, self-addressed envelope to Zamora, and in a personal letter to you, she will tell you your fortune from the cards you have laid out.



Zamora
All-Story Love
205 East 42nd Street, New York City
Dear Zamora:

Here is a list of the cards in my fortune. What do they mean? I enclose fifteen cents and a stamped, self-addressed envelope for your reading.

NAME.....

STREET or BOX.....

CITY..... STATE.....

BIRTHDAY..... AGE.....

SINGLE..... MARRIED..... DIVORCED.....

4—51

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By ALMA PORTEGAL

THERE'S hardly a man, and mighty few women who don't care for a bowl of soup. Some like it hot, and some like it cold; there are those who favor a thick meaty soup, and others who prefer theirs thin and clear. But soup is the accepted beginnings for most meals; and often it is the meal itself.

RUSSIAN CABBAGE SOUP

1 lb. short ribs of beef
1 tablespoon salt
2½ cups canned tomatoes
½ clove garlic, cut fine
4 tablespoons sugar
2 tablespoons fat
7 cups water
¼ teaspoon pepper
1 large onion
1 medium head cabbage
2 tablespoons lemon juice or vinegar
6 tablespoons sour cream (optional)

Melt the fat in a soup kettle and brown the meat in this, just lightly. Add the onion sliced and let get a golden color. Add the water, salt, pepper and tomatoes, also the garlic and if you want to you can also add a bayleaf. Simmer this gently for 2 hours. Shred the cabbage coarsely and add. Add also the sugar and lemon juice. Simmer for another 2 hours until the meat is tender. Taste it at this point and see if it is properly sweet and tart. Serve, if desired, with a spoonful of sour cream on each portion. Serves 6 or more.

CHINESE TOMATO SOUP

4 cups canned tomatoes
1 teaspoon sugar
2 teaspoons soy sauce
2 eggs
1 cup water
1 teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon grated onion

Combine the tomatoes, water, sugar, salt, soy sauce and onion. Simmer for 20 minutes or so. Beat the eggs well, add to the hot soup and stir constantly until the eggs form little yellow strings. Serve hot. Serves 4 or more.

BEAN SOUP, MEXICAN STYLE

½ cup dried navy beans
3 cups cold water
1 cup chopped celery
½ cup shredded cabbage
2 tablespoons shortening
3 tablespoons chopped onion
2½ teaspoons salt
1 cup canned tomatoes
1 clove of garlic
1 tablespoon chopped parsley
dash or two of pepper
¾ cup cooked noodles

Wash the beans and soak overnight in the water. Bring the water and beans to a boil, then simmer until tender adding more water if necessary. Melt the shortening in a pan, saute the garlic, finely minced, also the onion, celery, cabbage and parsley until lightly browned. Add the beans with the seasonings and the tomatoes and simmer half a minute longer. Add the cooked noodles, and more water if necessary. Serves 6 or more.

JUNGLE SOUP

1 cup dry split peas (green)
1 can of tomato soup (condensed)

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1 bouillon cube
3 pints of water
2 cans of water (after soup is removed)
salt, pepper, celery salt to taste

Bring the 3 pints of water and the split peas to a boil, then simmer until the peas are cooked to a soft, wet paste. Be careful not to let this burn. Then add the bouillon cube dissolved in some water, the tomato soup and using the can from this, 2 cans of water. Now taste and season. A little more water may be addded if you like a thinner soup. Serves 6 or more.

CREAM OF POTATO SOUP

3 cups diced peeled potatoes
2 cups water
3 tablespoons flour
¼ teaspoon sage
3 cups milk
3 medium onions, sliced
6 tablespoons butter
2 teaspoons salt
dash or two of pepper and celery salt
2 tablespoons minced parsley

Cook the potatoes in water until soft. Melt the butter in a large pan and blend in the flour and seasonings. Add milk, stirring constantly over low heat until mixture thickens. Force potatoes, onions and liquid through a sieve. Combine with the cream sauce; reheat and serve topped with the parsley. Serves 6.

DU BARRY SOUP

1 cup raw rice
1 cup cooked cauliflower
1 pint rich milk
2 quarts clear chicken broth
salt, pepper, poultry seasoning to taste
2 tablespoons butter
2 tablespoons flour
½ cup cooked cauliflower—cut small

Boil the rice in the broth until tender. Rub the cupful of cauliflower through a sieve into the soup. Melt the butter and all the flour and mix with some of the soup to a smooth sauce. Add this to the soup; season to taste with the salt, pepper and poultry seasoning (go easy on the last) Add the milk slowly and heat well. Serve with several pieces of the cauliflower in each cup. Serves 6 or more.

ESSENCE OF TOMATO SOUP

2 lbs. ripe tomatoes
2 leek
6 outside lettuce leaves (not the heart)
1 cup empty pea pods (coarsely chopped)
2 quarts cold water
salt, pepper, and some dried herbs such as basil, sage, thyme
1 bunch green celery (tops only)
1 small potato

As you can see this is an inexpensive soup made mostly of the things usually discarded. Simmer the whole thing for 2 hours or so, then mash it well and put through a fine sieve.

LOBSTER BISQUE

1 can condensed tomato soup
1 can of cream of mushroom soup
1 can of milk (use tomato soup can as measure)
Add 1 can of lobster meat
paprika, curry and a small lump of butter

Combine the soups, milk and lobster meat, cut in small pieces and simmer until well heated. Season with the paprika and a dash or so of curry. Drop in the butter and let it melt. Serves 6 or more.

LEEK AND POTATO SOUP

1 quart beef stock or 1 quart of water and 4 bouillon cubes
4 medium sized potatoes
½ teaspoon salt
3 tablespoons butter
1 bunch of leeks
dash or so of pepper
dash or so of celery salt and onion salt

Cut the potatoes into small pieces after paring them. Put into soup kettle with the water or stock. Wash leeks very well as they harbor sand in their centers. Cut them into small pieces and add with seasonings to the soup. Bring to a boil and cook, covered about 20 minutes or so until all are soft. Force through a coarse sieve. Serve hot well seasoned with the salt, pepper, butter, celery salt and onion salt to taste. Serves 4 or 5.

PETITE MARMITE

3 cold boiled potatoes
¼ cup chopped celery tops

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Mitch was slow to learn that you can't judge a girl by her father's bank account.

Love My Money

By RENIE STONE

CANDY lit her third cigarette and glanced impatiently at her wrist watch. One-thirty. Mitch was supposed to have stopped by at twelve to take her to lunch. She bit her lip, which had begun to tremble with a sob. Why are you crying, Candace Green? Has Mitch ever, ever been on time? No, she answered herself definitely, it isn't that—but on this one day, this very special day—the day after Mitch had proposed . . .

After a night of excited wakefulness, every second seemed an eternity, a lifetime of waiting to see that grinning, boyish face, to feel those strong, protecting arms around her. And now he was an hour and a half late, and she had something important to tell him. Something important! Maybe it was too important. Maybe she should have told him when they'd met, six beautiful months ago. Maybe he'd feel she had been deceiving him all this time. Maybe he would never marry her after this—he was so fiery, so impetuous, so influenced by his ideals and emotions.

Jitters, she warned herself sternly. Bride's jitters. And then she smiled, for the first time in an hour. It made her look like the carefree, beauty-endowed cover girl she was rather than a care-ridden little blonde in a fit of chain-smoking.

Candy had flowing, pale gold hair and large violet eyes, fringed with luxuriously long amber lashes. Her wealthy parents had been so intent on sending her to the best schools that they'd neglected to see that she learned anything practical. Their sprawling Virginia estate was large enough and rich enough to provide a glorious background during her deb days until, as her two sisters before her, she'd snatched one of the richest, most eligible of Southern gentlemen.

But Candy had a couple of ideas of her own. She didn't like her rich, purposeless life. She didn't like her overdone home and her overdone friends. And she didn't like any of the eligible young Southern gentlemen she knew.

Six months ago, after she'd graduated from an exclusive Southern girl's college, she'd realized she hadn't anything to her credit that would ever find her a job. But she had one thing she could trade on—her beauty. And if it meant starting out with only that as her stock-in-trade, she was determined to do it. So she gathered her graduation money and the small savings account she'd accumulated from parts of her generous allowances, and took off for New York.

Candy was twenty-one, beautiful, and a perfect size twelve. So she found a job modeling teen-age coats and suits. Then the Ferris Model Agency discovered her, and her face started to appear on magazine covers. And during that time, too, she found Mitch Douglas.

She'd rented a studio apartment in the West Eighties where many young hopefuls

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"Oh, Mitch, why can't you ever be serious?" Candy scolded helplessly.

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from all points of the country found themselves with their fantastic young dreams of success and fame. Most of the men in the building were artists and musicians, and most of the girls were models. Many of them lived from hand to mouth, sometimes making a few hundred dollars at a clip and then not working for a couple of months. And then there were those who were constantly sent out on high paying jobs. Candy was, at last, one of these.

AT THE beginning, however, she'd walked the streets with all the rest, actually enjoying the need to scrimp and budget as they had to do. They hadn't savings accounts and graduation money and families they could wire for a dollar or a hundred dollars. So for all practical purposes she forgot she was Candace Green of the Sherman Marshall Greens of Virginia. To Mitch, as to everyone else there, she was Candy Green from a small town in Virginia where her father was in the insurance business. Did she have to explain that he was president of one of the biggest insurance companies of the East?

Everyone took to Candy right away, because of her innate sweetness and friendliness and a fetchingly exuberant personality. Those were the things Mitch liked about her so much. In their many jobless days she had posed for him and he'd painted for her hours on end. Nothing commercial, though. He'd say that his paintings of her would be kept for his sacred archives.

And there were the times when he didn't even have enough money to buy his painting supplies, and she had insisted on lending it to him. She'd explain about some money she'd saved from the last job. And then in a week he'd be overloaded with assignments—some advertising art, some magazine illustrations, and he'd work night and day. He'd pay Candy back and they'd go out on the town.

And in those jobless days Mitch told her about his poverty-stricken boyhood in a small Pennsylvania town, often with barely enough food. How his father worked in a steel mill, and his ailing mother took in washing to keep the family going. And how, as a boy, he had always vowed to make a pile of money and use it wisely and enjoyably, like no one else he knew who had money did. That was it—the sore spot of his life—his bitter resentment of rich people.

Candy had started her lie at the very innocent beginning. And then they had fallen in love. They took long walks on warm summer nights, boat rides in Central Park, went to outdoor concerts, or they just sat in Central Park and held hands. They explored New York together in the fall and they had all sorts of favorite little haunts and meeting places that Candy would rush to after a modeling job and Mitch after his work on an illustration or a conference with an editor.

Candy was usually on time whenever she had to meet Mitch, but he was invariably late. He'd always come up behind her and cover her eyes with his hands and kiss the back of her head, whether they were on Times Square, Fifth Avenue or Greenwich Village. And he'd always have a crazy little gift for her for being late—a pencil taken from an editor's desk or a flower from a street vender or a ten-cent store ring. And they'd laugh and kiss and have a coke or a Martini, depending on their financial status.

They'd return to the apartment house late and stand in front of her door locked in thrilling embrace, and he'd say "When I make my pile, we're going to spend the first three dollars on a marriage license." And she'd close and lock her door and he'd tap on it softly and say "Sweet dreams. I love you." And she'd lean on the other side of the door, her heart throbbing like a wild thing, as though it had been the first time she'd heard those words. And she'd wonder how one person could hold

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so much happiness contained within her.

AND THEN last night, he'd proposed in earnest. He'd said, "I've been a fool, Candy. People in love don't wait for the world to be just right for them, because it's that way, really, if you're in love. Darling, I have nothing but myself, and my love for you, to offer. Will you marry me?" And she'd cried and clung to him and said, "Oh, yes, Mitch. Soon. I love you so!" And heaven didn't seem to be way up at all, but right there.

Then he asked what her family would think, and what they were like. He started to grow sentimental, saying how glad he was that she had a family and how he hoped they would take him in. Candy managed to evade definite answers, and just generalized about her parents—how good-natured they were, how understanding and devoted.

But Mitch would want to meet them, and Candy had no idea in the world of how to explain that she'd lied to him. For that's what the whole thing amounted to. Mitch, idealistic and trusting, would never forgive her for lying. But Candy realized that she could put it off no longer. She had to come to a decision, now, and before Mitch arrived. And then it hit her: she wouldn't tell him anything about her family and the true story of her background. Whenever he had questioned her, her answers had been vague enough to lead him to believe that she came from a commonplace family in a small Virginia town, and had led a commonplace life. Now she could take him home and let him see for himself that not all wealthy people were stone-hearted Scrooges, who spent their time counting their fortunes. Mitch would understand then. He would realize that the bitterness he'd been nursing for so many years had really been unfounded, and he would forgive Candy for the little entanglement she'd gotten herself caught in with such good intentions.

The buzzer burst in upon her thoughts and she ran to the door. She hardly got it open before she was caught up in a smothering embrace. Mitch's dark head bent to hers swiftly and his lips found hers in a kiss of joy and love. She clung to him fiercely, realizing that with all of his boyish whims and crazy forgetfulness and stubborn ideas, there was no one else in the world for her.

"Darling," he cried when he finally let her go, "I have the most wonderful news you've ever heard." His dark eyes flashed in rare excitement, and his dazzling smile lighted up his handsome, tanned face with electric intensity. Candy loved his tall leanness, felt secure in his strength and vitality, and she was always surprised when that little-boy quality crept in.

"Correction, darling, the second most wonderful," she said softly as she held his face between her hands. "The very best was last night. Remember?"

"Look, lollipop," he went on, ready to burst with his news, "I just sold a cover to *Chic Lady*."

"No!" Candy cried, her eyes flying wide with happy surprise. "The new fashion slick. Why darling, you must have made a fortune!"

HE PICKED her up in his arms and carried her swiftly to the sofa, plunking her down on his lap. "A mere two grand," he said against the golden head snuggled on his shoulder.

Candy shot up straight and stared at him incredulously. "Two—oh, Mitch, that's impossible!"

"I don't care what it is, but it's happened, my sweet one." He paused, an impish twinkle in his eye. "Oh, I'm sorry I'm late, lollipop, but I had a little business to attend to. I bought a car!"

"Oh, no!" It was a hopeless wail. "You don't mean you spent the whole thing on a car."

"Nope," he replied smugly. "Just a

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quarter of it. You know Phil Crane's little yellow convertible?"

"He sold it to you for five hundred dollars?"

"Yup. It's more than he would have gotten on a trade-in, so he let me have it. And darling, I have a surprise—we're going to visit your folks tomorrow!" he added.

"Visit my—tomorrow!"

"Sure. We've got to break in the buggy right, and tomorrow's Saturday, so we'll have a whole weekend to spend in sunny Virginia." He said softly, "Mr. and Mrs. Green want to see what they're getting into with this new-fangled son-in-law of theirs." His voice grew serious then. "I want your family to like me, Candy. I want to do the right thing. Now that I'm able to."

"Oh, Mitch," she crooned in what she hoped sounded like a gratefully affectionate voice, when what she really felt was sheer panic.

"I've been wanting to pay them a visit for a while now, darling," he went on apologetically. "But things were so uncertain, and I knew you didn't want to 'present' me unless things were more definite between us." He laughed a little self-consciously. "I guess I always had an exaggerated family feeling, which doesn't seem to go with the rest of my personality."

"Don't you know that's why I love you, dear?" she said laughingly pulling his hair. "You're always full of surprises!"

He stopped her laugh with a kiss that spread an always new, warmly delicious feeling through her. "And now," he said, standing her on the floor and looking down into her star-filled eyes sternly, "Patch up that lipstick job and get your coat. I'm starved!"

THEY HAD lunch in a little Viennese restaurant and then went over to Phil Grane's to pick up the car. "Have to break it in for the trip," he announced gaily as he tucked Candy into the seat and slid under the wheel. "It's a perfect day for shopping, too," he added as they glided across town toward Fifth Avenue.

"But darling, you didn't get the check for the cover yet, did you?" Candy protested.

"I got an advance," he said proudly patting his back pocket. "The balance will be in the mail next week. I can't visit my future in-laws empty-handed!" So they bought lingerie for Candy's mother at Saks Fifth Avenue and a hand-made pipe for her father at an exclusive Madison Avenue shop. Mitch was like a little boy buying his first Christmas gifts, and when Candy made a face at the price-tags he waved her off, saying, "How often does your mother get something from Saks?" or "Your father'll be thrilled with this, kitten. He'd never be able to get such a pipe in Laureltown." Candy had to try hard not to burst out laughing. Her mother who did all of her shopping in the finest stores, and who had a charge account in all of New York's better shops, and her father who was surrounded by only the highest quality luxuries.

They celebrated with champagne at dinner that night and then drove to Long Island for dancing. The music was soft and dream-filled, and when Mitch held Candy in his arms so adoringly she knew that she never had to worry about him not understanding anything in the world concerning both of them. Everything would smooth itself out.

But driving along the highway the next morning Candy decided she should make some sort of attempt to prepare Mitch.

She began, not daring to look at him, "Darling, there's something I didn't tell you about my family."

"Aha, so there's a family skeleton involved!" he bantered.

"Well," Candy said, laughing uncomfortably, "Not exactly. That is Mum and Daddy are a little—different."

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"I've never yet heard any kids speak about their parents when they didn't claim they were different from other kids' parents. It's the darndest thing. But then, there must be something pretty special about a couple who've produced something like you, my sugar Candy!"

"Oh, Mitch, why can't you ever be serious?" Candy scolded helplessly. And somehow she let the conversation end right there, and switched to excited plans for their future.

They reached Candy's home early that afternoon. When she pointed to the driveway beside the white marble-pillared beautifully landscaped house, Mitch smiled and squeezed her hand and kept on driving. "All right, darling, we'll have a big house someday, but it'll be all fieldstone and plate glass, so save your dreams till then."

She interrupted desperately, "Mitch, please turn back. That *is* my house. I wanted to tell you, but . . ."

SHE COULDN'T finish when she saw the look on his face.

"You're not kidding?"

"No," she managed weakly.

He turned the little convertible around and guided it carefully up the gravel driveway, not speaking, just looking like a dog whose master had left him.

"Mitch," she began again as he stopped the car and climbed out.

"Yes," he cut in as he opened the door and helped her out, "I guess there are some things you didn't get around to telling me."

"Oh, darling," she sobbed as he banged the door shut. "There was so much to say that I didn't know how to start, so I thought the best thing was just to . . ."

But he wasn't listening. He was opening the trunk, pulling out their weekend bags and muttering. "The insurance business . . ."

Candy stood there helplessly, barely audible as she said, "Daddy is in the insurance business, Mitch. He's president of the Royal Indemnity Company."

She had to clench her teeth as she watched him. She'd never seen him look at her like that before.

He was saying, "Well, I suppose I'll have to go through with this farce."

"Farce?" Candy's eyes grew dark as she stared at him incredulously. A stab of pain like a knife's gash went through her heart, and everything inside of her seemed to crumble. She saw Mitch turn toward the porch and then noticed her mother standing there, waving frantically.

"Candy! Darling! Is it really you?"

"Yes, Mum. Surprise!" she called, trying to sound gay but failing miserably. "We'll be right up."

When she turned back to Mitch, who was holding a suitcase in each hand, tears glistened in her eyes. "If you feel that way about it, Mitch, I won't tell them anything about us. I guess you've changed your mind already. I thought I knew you better, but I suppose I really didn't know you at all. I was going to explain, but now I don't feel it's necessary." With that she walked away, up toward the house, keeping ahead of him until they reached the porch. Mrs. Green stood there, a happy smile lighting up her face with its chiselled, aristocratic features.

"Darling, you bad girl," she cried, hugging Candy to her. "Not even telling me you were coming, and bringing this nice young man with you!" She was looking at Mitch, who had set down the suitcases and was smiling uncomfortably.

"This is Mitchell Douglas," Candy said mechanically, and hardly heard Mitch's polite "How do you do, ma'am," as he shook hands with her mother. She was thinking, with an icy sheet of pain coursing through her, how not less than a half hour ago she was bringing home the man she would marry. It was always such a big event in a girl's life. And now, she thought

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brokenly, I've brought home the man who feels nothing more for me than contempt.

THEN ABRAHAM, the old Negro butler, was on the porch, welcoming Miss Candy home and picking up the bags. Candy entered the house first, and her mother followed with Mitch, chattering about how seldom they get to see their Candy, and how they hate having her so far away from them.

"Tell me, Mr. Douglas—oh, dear, I hate formalities. May I call you Mitchell?" she said warmly.

Mitch smiled naturally for the first time since his arrival. "I wish you'd call me Mitch, like all my friends do," he replied.

She continued earnestly, "Tell me, Mitch, is my little girl getting along all right in New York? I hear about all these girls who . . ."

"Oh, fiddlesticks, Mum!" Candy cut in laughingly. "You're just as worrisome as ever!" She gave her mother an affectionate hug, and thought she noticed a new look in Mitch's eyes, which was gone as suddenly as it had came.

"Your daughter is a very capable and self-sufficient young lady," Mitch said. "And you have every reason to be proud of her."

Candy saw the cynical curve to his lips as he surveyed the thickly-carpeted living room furnished richly with rare pieces and priceless objects. The look remained through lunch, at the long mahogany table set with a lace cloth and gleaming, heavy silver. Mrs. Green explained that Candy's father was away for the day but Mitch would meet him that evening.

"I'm afraid I'll have to leave rather early," he replied coolly. "It's a long drive back to New York, and I want to get started before it's too dark."

Candy's heart thudded dully. So this was it—this was the end of a romance which had opened up a new world of radiance and beauty and indescribable ecstasy. He was walking out of her life just as abruptly as he'd entered it—and taking her heart along with him.

"Oh, what a shame!" Mrs. Green exclaimed, but her instinctive courtesy seemed to prevent her from prying in any way. "I was hoping you could stay till at least tomorrow night."

"That's awfully nice of you, Mrs. Green, but I'm afraid I must get back soon."

Mrs. Green turned to Candy. "Well, darling, I guess you'll be with us for a while, since you brought two suitcases. I'm so glad. We've missed you, Candy."

"Oh, I—yes Mum. I haven't been home for so long. I'll be around for a while." I can't go back to New York. I can't ever see Mitch again, knowing he's no longer mine!

Mrs. Green excused herself after lunch and left for a bridge party. After she had gone, Candy nervously invited Mitch into her father's den to see his hunting trophies. There'll be a showdown any minute now, she thought, and there's no sense having the servants hear it.

QUITE A PLACE you have here," Mitch remarked as he closed the door to the handsome room, lined with bookshelves, stuffed animals' heads, and comfortable massive leather furniture.

She turned to him then, and he was disturbingly close.

"Mitch," she said in a tremulous voice, "I suppose . . ."

"Please don't apologize about anything, Candy," he cut in huskily, grasping her shoulders fiercely, his touch like gripping fire to her.

"Apologize!" The pain in her face slowly turned to fury as she lashed out. "I'll never apologize to you for anything, Mitch Douglas, least of all my family. I have nothing to be ashamed of in them. Maybe I was wrong in not telling you the truth, but I never did actually lie to you. I was afraid to tell you all of the truth because

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of your stupid, narrow prejudice against people you really don't know. You can't go around saying rich people are bad just like you can't say that redheads are disloyal just because you've known a redhead who once stood you up. You're . . ."

But she couldn't finish, because he pulled her to him roughly and pressed his lips against hers in a kiss that was savage and hating. Mitch had never kissed her like that, and it was a more final gesture than any words could ever be.

When he let her go she was sobbing raggedly, but he thrust her from him and walked toward the door. When he reached it he turned and said, very low, "I don't like to hurt anyone, Candy. But I can't love a woman I can't trust. You weren't honest with me, and I'm afraid it's spoiled everything for us."

She stopped crying, and just stood there looking like a pathetically unhappy little girl. He went to her slowly, but she didn't move. Then he was wiping the tears from her cheeks with his hanky, and she closed her eyes for a precious instant so she could always remember his gentle touch, his concern for her even now, when he hated her. For he must hate her, she thought achingly. She *had* been dishonest. But hate him? She could never feel anything but love and longing for Mitch, she was sure.

"I hope you'll be happy, Candy," he said as he stood there looking down at her. She couldn't answer—there were all kinds of knots tied in her throat. And just then the door was flung open and a large, handsome, gray-haired man bustled in.

CANDY!" he boomed, rushing to her in joyful disbelief and hugging her unashamedly. "When did you get home, angel-face?"

"Hello Daddy," she said, kissing him with a brave show of affection. "I just got

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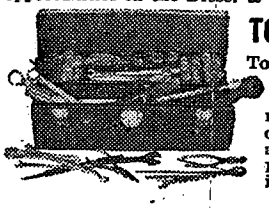

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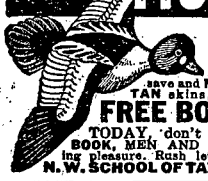

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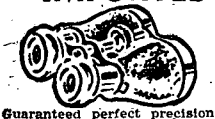

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in this afternoon. Daddy, I'd like you to . . ."

"Well, well," he interrupted, letting her go abruptly as he noticed Mitch for the first time. "You've brought a friend with you, I see." He took Mitch's hand and shook it heartily.

"You from New York, young fellow?" he asked, pulling Candy to him again and hugging her shoulders affectionately.

"Yes, sir," Mitch replied. "That is, I've lived there several years. I'm from Pennsylvania originally."

"Well, practically a neighbor, eh? What do you do in New York, son?" Candy winced at the word.

"I—I'm an artist, sir," Mitch said hesitantly.

"An artist! Say, maybe you can give me a few ideas. One of the clerks in my office has been sort of teaching me how to paint, and I've been having a great old time with it and he says I—er—have some talent, and should take professional instruction." He chuckled self-consciously. "Now, I know I'm not a Rembrandt, and I've never had the nerve to ask an artist what he thought of my scratchings—this clerk is sort of an amateur himself, but he's good—and he sort of talked me into it. Would you-er-care to look at my work sometime?"

"I—I'd be delighted to, sir. I'm sorry I haven't the time now."

"Oh, you mean you're not staying for a while?" Mr. Green looked disappointed.

"Well, as a matter of fact, sir, I was just getting ready to leave," Mitch answered apologetically.

"Oh, too bad. Too bad." Mr. Green held out his hand. "Well, come again, my boy. Soon."

Candy flushed. She took Mitch's arm in a pretense of nonchalant friendliness. "Well, I'll see you on your way, Mitch. I'll be back in a minute, Daddy."

Candy didn't see Mitch drive away, be-

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cause her vision was all blurred by tears. With an empty, aching feeling she turned and ran up to her bedroom, her only consolation a mute, tear-stained pillow. I've lost him, she sobbed softly, I've lost my love and it's all my fault. She fell asleep and didn't awaken until she heard the dinner bell several hours later.

THAT EVENING some of her parents' friends came over, and Candy's mother asked her to come in for a while.

"Oh, Mum, I'd rather not, tonight, if you don't mind." She felt numb and aimless, and couldn't bear the thought of facing those laughing, happy people.

"Just to say hello, dear," Mrs. Green pleaded. "They know you're home, and it would . . ."

"Oh, all right, Mum. Just for a minute, though."

Mrs. Green looked at her keenly. "What is it, Candy?"

"Nothing Mum. I'd rather not talk about it now, please."

"Yes, dear." She patted her hand understandingly. "Everything will be all right. You'll see. When a man looks at you like Mitch did, it can end only one way."

"Mum! But that's not . . ."

"I may sound wrong now, but just wait and see, darling."

But Candy knew it couldn't turn out all right—not this. Not when a girl had been blindly negligent of the man she loved. How could anyone put his trust in a person who'd deceived him so grossly?

She spent a sleepless night and couldn't touch a morsel of food at breakfast the next morning.

Candy put on her old green topcoat, tied a burnt-orange kerchief over her golden head, and went outside for a long, lonely walk in the brisk winter morning air. There was a little path that ran around the back of the house and out into the woods where

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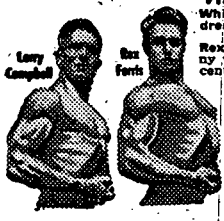

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she always used to walk for miles when she wanted to be alone to think about something. Those days seemed so long ago. How love matured people, she realized suddenly. Only last year she was a gay, carefree debutante with the world at her feet. Now, the bottom of that world had been taken from under her very nose.

Suddenly something about the whole situation clarified itself in Candy's mind. She had done the damage, but had she made any attempt to repair it? She had been hurt, crushed, but she'd sunk into a web of self-pity and not even gotten up to fight another round. And Mitch was worth fighting for! He was stubborn, but he was a lot of wonderful things, too.

I'll go to him, she decided, and found herself running back toward the house. I'll make him listen to me. I'll tell him I loved him too much to risk losing him by spoiling his illusion about me.

Tears blurred her vision as she neared the end of the path that wove around the back of the house in view of the broad driveway. That was why she stopped and blinked a couple of times when she thought she saw a little convertible parked there. It wasn't really there, it was just the tears, and the sunlight . . .

SHE DIDN'T hear him come up from behind her. She just felt the strong arms put a circle around both of them, closing in heaven by an embrace she thought she'd lost forever.

"Hello lollipop," Mitch said huskily. And then she saw his eyes. They contained anguish and love and fear, all at the same time. "I've come back. I've been the biggest kind of heel, darling, and I've paid for all of my wretched subbornness on my trip back—just by realizing how miserable I've been to you, and how wrong. How very, very wrong!"

"Oh, Mitch!" she breathed, "You can't—you don't—I . . ."

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"You've got to give me another chance, Candy," he said, with a note of desperation that was new to Candy's ears. "Please listen to me. I was such a fool, nursing bitterness against people I didn't even know, just because I thought they were something they're not—I mean, that comparison you made yesterday about redheads. Oh, sweetheart, you were right in everything you said about me, but that isn't as bad as the worst thing." He stopped and almost held his breath, as if the shame of what he was going to say was too much for him to admit, even at this moment.

"Oh, Candy, I didn't even give you a chance to explain. I didn't even show the understanding that people in love are known to have. I failed you miserably. You did everything you did because you loved me—even put up with my mulish stubbornness. And then I saw what kind of parents you have—devoted and loving and real, such real people. I should have known, having you as a daughter. Darling, do you think you could ever forgive me? Have I ruined the most beautiful thing in our lives?"

"Oh, Mitch," she said, trying to keep the tears out of her voice. "I don't even have room to forgive you for anything. All of my feelings are taken up with loving you!"

"Lollipop!" He tilted her face up close to his. "I'll make it up to you, my sweetest Candy. And if I ever get out of hand again, you can just . . ."

"Oh, Mitch!" she wailed, "Please listen to me. I have something to tell you—I was thinking that I've been all wrong, too, and I . . ."

"Save it for some other time, darling. Right now I'm not in a listening mood." And his kiss, warm and sweet and exciting, told her that she didn't have to explain—not when she could love like that.

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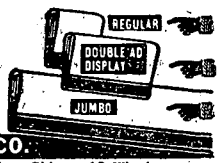

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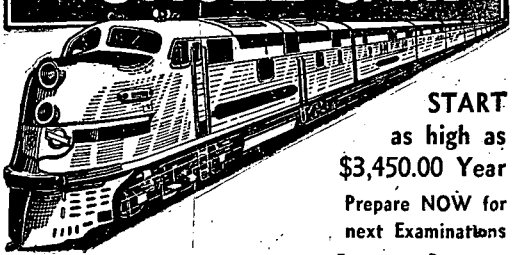

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(Continued from page 95)

1 tablespoon butter
1 finely chopped onion
4 cups milk
salt, pepper and paprika to taste

Melt the butter in a soup kettle and in it lightly brown the onion and celery tops. Mash the potatoes well, or put them through a coarse sieve. Slowly add the milk and any of the water in which the potatoes were cooked. Simmer to heat, season and serve.

HEILBRONN SOUP

3 quarts water in which vegetables have been cooked
2 tablespoons butter
¼ lb. fresh mushrooms or a small of can of "Broiled in Butter" mushrooms
salt, pepper and a dash of nutmeg.
½ cup washed barley

Melt the butter and add the mushrooms; cook until they have almost absorbed the butter. Remove this and in the remaining butter slowly brown the barley just a little. Now add the barley to the broth or vegetable water. Season with the salt, pepper and nutmeg to taste. Simmer until the barley is cooked, about three-fourths of an hour. Add the mushrooms and heat for 5 or 10 minutes to blend. Serves 6 or more.

CAULIFLOWER AND TOMATO PUREE

1 Small head of cauliflower
2 cups canned tomatoes
2 cups vegetable water or stock
1 teaspoon sugar
2 teaspoons fat or butter
3 tablespoons flour
a pinch of basil
salt, pepper and poultry seasoning

Cook the cauliflower until tender and chop it fine. Save the water in which it was cooked adding water if necessary to make the two cups. Put the canned tomatoes through a sieve and add to the cauliflower puree. Melt the butter in a pan and stir in the flour, smooth to a sauce with the puree stirring constantly until slightly thickened. Season to taste with the salt, pepper and poultry seasonings. This serves 6.

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BACK DOOR TO ROMANCE

(Continued from page 92)

"I thought—I knew she loved you, and I thought you were the one, not Carl."

"Lois!" he said incredulously. "Sandra has kept it a careful secret, of course. Carl knows, and a few other people. I assumed you knew, too."

Her heart was pounding. Sandra was his mother. He was free. Free!

"I'm so glad!" she breathed. "That's why I left Sandra's really, because you were asking me to go out, and I . . ."

She stopped, her eyes fearful and questioning, her mouth tremulous.

His face was very sober. "It's probably just as well," he said. "I'm afraid our paths don't lie together, Lois."

Her eyes darkened, and he said, "I love you. You must know that. You must feel it. But I don't want a Hollywood wife. Besides, the government has called me to Washington to do some research in aeronautics. Sandra and I were celebrating my last night here. I leave tomorrow."

Lois was very white, her eyes deep with emotion. "Jed, if I were not 'Hollywood', would you take me with you?"

"If you are like Sandra, you wouldn't be happy," he said.

"I'm not like Sandra!" she cried, her voice breaking. "I've hated it all—the horrible clothes, the silly, artificial stuff they put on me, everything! I've never liked it. I only did it because I couldn't bear to see you with Sandra, thinking you loved her. Oh, Jed!"

He took a step and she was in his arms and he was murmuring blessed, tender endearments against her hair, holding her as if she were something dearer than anything in all the world.

"You'll just be Mrs. Jed Masters," he said. "No Peacock Girl. No spotlights. No glamour. Just a man and his wife. It will be . . ."

"Heaven!" Lois breathed, as his lips found hers.

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This beautiful postage stamp, issued by the Republic of Cuba in memory of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, sent absolutely free together with a copy of our informative booklet **"How to Collect Stamps"** and our illustrated price lists. Supply limited—please do not request more than one.

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MIDWAY COMPANY Dept. SPF-3 KEARNEY, NEBRASKA

ALL-STORY LOVE

(Continued from page 12)

A-2743 FROM ICELAND

This tall blonde girl with blue eyes works in a store in Iceland. I left high school four years ago. I like movies, dancing, radio and reading. I would like very much to have some American pen pals and will do my best to make my letters interesting.

Gogo
(5c postage)

A-2744 SOUTH AFRICA CALLING

Here is a seventeen year old boy, with black eyes, dark hair, five feet eight, who would like very much to hear from American girls his age. I am a grease monkey and next to that I like sports of all kinds. Also like pets, dogs and fowls, like dancing too.

Percy
(5c postage)

A-2745 SOUTHERN MISS

I am an eighteen year old southern girl, have dark brown hair and eyes and am five feet six. Like reading, writing, sewing and movies. Also like all outdoor sports. I'd like to receive letters from boys and girls around my own age and up. Will exchange snaps.

Fran

A-2746 WRITER

This thirty-five year old man has traveled all over the world. I enjoy all sports, also fishing and hunting, like to read and go to movies. Right now I'm writing short stories. I'd like to hear from anyone, any age. Will answer all letters.

Bob

A-2747 LONELY NURSE

I am a nurse, twenty-five years old, have brown hair and eyes, am five feet four. My pastime is reading. I play the piano, love all kinds of music. Best of all I like to help people get well. Am doing private work and am on at night, so am very lonesome.

Lonesome

A-2748 DECORATOR

Decorating churches and theaters is the occupation of this man, forty-six years old, with black hair, brown eyes, five feet nine inches tall. I travel all over in the course of my work. Like shows, reading and fishing. I'd like to hear from women thirty-five and up.

Barney

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THE FRIENDLY CIRCLE

A-2749 LIKES PEOPLE

Here is a twenty-four old girl, five feet four and a half, with blue eyes, brown hair. I love all sports and choose art as my favorite pastime. I love people, love to talk, but now that I'm not working or going to school nights, am very lonely.

Ginger

A-2750 COLLECTS PICS

I am a lonely boy of seventeen, almost eighteen years. Am five feet nine and a half. I like most sports, also fishing and hunting. Like to read, listen to hillbilly music, work with radios and electrical appliances. I collect photographs of all people as a hobby.

Strick

A-2751 OKLAHOMA BLONDE

This fifteen year old girl, five feet five, blonde hair and green eyes, and likes boys. I would like to write to some and hear about places that they live in.

Green Eyes

A-2752 ENGINEER

I am single, twenty-one, five feet ten, male, have blond hair and blue eyes. I like all sports, but skiing and football are tops. I am studying engineering in the winter and working as a lineman in summer. I would like to hear from some girls. Will exchange snapshots.

Bud

A-2753 SOUTH AFRICAN GIRL

Is there any chance of a young South African girl getting letters from American boys? I am fifteen, have blue eyes, brown hair, and am a senior in school. Like singing, playing the organ, cricket and rugby. Am five feet four.

Bunny
(5c postage)

A-2754 IN YOUR THIRTY'S

I am looking for letters from ladies around thirty, but will answer all letters. I am a thirty-five year old man, interested in baseball, fishing, reading good books. Am five feet eleven, have brown hair and blue eyes. Will exchange snapshots.

Bouce

A-2755 LONELY GIRL

Here is a lonely girl, twenty years old, with dark brown eyes and brown hair. I'm easy to get along with and like home life, music, movies. I'd like very much to hear

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for selling only 50 boxes of our 200 greeting card line. And this can be done in a single day. Free samples. Other leading boxes on approval. Many surprise items. It costs nothing to try. Write today.

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from men between the ages of twenty-one to thirty, Frenchmen preferred, but will answer all.

Butch

A-2756 COLLECTS RECORDS

This nineteen year old boy would like to hear from people everywhere, especially abroad. I like to dance, swim, play tennis, write letters, collect records and stamps. I am a clerk in a clothing store. Am blond, have green eyes, am five feet eight.

John

A-2757 ORPHAN

I am a sixteen year old girl and have been living in a Baptist orphanage for nine years and can say I am very thankful. I love to roller skate, swim, play games, like music. My hobby is taking pictures. I'd love to make friends with boys and girls from any state in the union.

Happy

A-2758 STAMP COLLECTOR

A fourteen year old boy would like to hear from boys and girls of all ages. I have dark brown hair and eyes and my hobby is collecting stamps. I live on a small farm and I am going to try a high school course at home. I'd like to have a lot of pals.

Bob

A-2759 TEXAS MISS

I am a young girl of fourteen, seeking pen pals both male and female. I have brown hair, hazel eyes, and am five feet four. I collect movie stars' pictures. I love horses. My favorite pastime is dancing. I promise to answer all letters, so don't disappoint me.

Jo

A-2760 MANHATTANITE

This thirty-five year old man would like to write to people who also find themselves lonely. I've had a college education, enjoy music, dancing, swimming, fishing, hunting. At present, I do accounting for a large firm. Would like to hear from pals around my age.

Jack

A-2761 SHE WRITES

An eighteen year old girl with blue eyes, reddish brown hair, five feet six and a half, would like to receive some letters. I write short stories and draw cartoons and sing a little to pass the time. Like sports, horseback riding especially. Will exchange snaps.

Pat

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THE FRIENDLY CIRCLE

A-2762 TEXAS GAL

Please write to me! I'm a Texas girl, twenty-four, five feet four and blonde. Would like to hear from girls who like music, exotic cooking, art, travel and clothes. Also from boys who are teachers, railroad men, cattlemen, farmers, newspapermen. But everyone's welcome, so start those letters rolling, pen pals.

Babe

A-2763 MAKES RINGS

I'm a young man of twenty-nine years young, have brown hair, gray eyes. My hobby is making beautiful jewelry and rings for men and women. I do my own designing, like cartooning, and drawing, also writing letters. Would like to exchange snaps and loads of letters!

Sad Sack

A-2764 COUNTRY GAL

Here's a nineteen year old blonde girl, five feet one, with blue eyes, who lives in the country. There isn't much to do, I go to college from September to May. Love to read, write letters, dance, fish, like bebop, jazz and boogie, also sweet music. Would love some pals.

Dee

A-2765 FORESTER

Being a forester in summer, hunting in the fall, and studying in winter are a few of the things this nineteen year old boy does to keep busy. I am five eight and a half, have dark hair. I have a motorcycle and hope to tour the states some day and want loads of pals please. Will answer all the letters I receive.

Richard

A-2766 BLONDIE

This seventeen year old miss has blonde hair and blue eyes and is five feet five. I love movies, reading and writing letters, also most sports and dancing. I am quite lonely and would like many pen pals, both boys and girls. Will answer all letters and exchange snaps.

Joan

A-2767 BACHELOR

A very lonely man of thirty-three is hoping to find someone to write to him, although he says he is not too good at writing letters. I work during the day and have plenty of time for writing. Live in a small but nice town. How about it, pals? Will you fill my mail box?

Mac

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New Car given as Bonus!

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GUARANTEED NINE MONTHS

Sensational Guarantee creating a tremendous demand for Wilknit Nylons! If they run, wear out or even snag from any cause whatever... within NINE MONTHS... depending on quantity... they are replaced FREE OF CHARGE. No wonder it's easy to quickly build up fine, steady, year-'round income. Earnings start immediately. Look at these exceptional figures—Ralph Shearer made $67.11, first week—Mrs. Paul Estes, $42.92—Mrs. Ivey Gentry, $43.37. Doris Jensen in addition to making as much as $17.00 in a single day, earned two cars as EXTRA BONUSES. Learn how you can make money in your full or spare time without a bit of previous experience.

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Now let Bob West, radio's favorite guitar player, show you how! Most "Courses" have only 6 or 8 pictures—but Bob's new method has 45 actual photographs! It not only teaches but shows exactly where and how to place your fingers, etc. Most others offer a few songs—Bob provides 101!—chosen for their radio popularity so you can sing and play right along with your favorite radio program or records!

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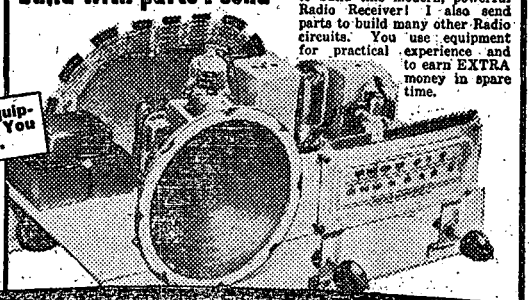
This is just part of the equipment my students build. You keep all parts I send.

You Practice Radio SERVICING

on this modern radio you build with parts I send



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- WATER RESISTANT
- 17 JEWELS
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- UNBREAKABLE CRYSTAL
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M304

$55

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Diamond-like Rhinestone Covered Watch. 17 Jewels in white case. Send $1, pay $2 upon delivery, 2.75 a month.

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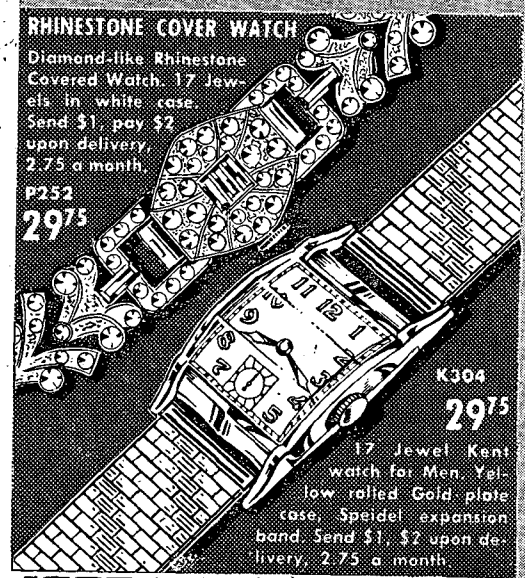

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